

DIFFERENCES IN RESISTANCE TO CHANGE BETWEEN
GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

by

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Abstract

Generational diversity and interaction in the workplace today have the potential to foster creativity and diverse thought, which can benefit an organization's bottom line. On the other hand, generational differences can also cause misunderstandings and confusion, creating tension and conflict between team members. The purpose of this study was to determine if differences existed between the four generations in the workplace – Silents, Baby Boomer, Gen Xers, and Millennials – specifically in terms of resistance to change.

A quantitative, descriptive approach was used in order to provide empirical support for the claim that members of some generations are more adept at change than others. Based on the theory that each generation has its own personality (or disposition), a four-facet structure to the disposition of resistance to change, developed by Oreg (2003), was used to provide the framework for this study. The four facets to the disposition of resistance to change are routine seeking, emotional reaction to imposed change, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity.

Data was collected from two participating organizations through an online version of the resistance to change scale developed by Oreg (2003) and was analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Bonferroni procedure. Contrary to the hypothesis that differences do exist, the results of the study showed no overall significant difference between generations on the disposition of resistance to change, although significant differences were found between Baby Boomers and two other generations on four specific survey questions. Ideas about why no differences were found between generations are presented in Chapter 5. In addition, some rationale is provided for why

some significant differences between Baby Boomers and two of the other generational groups were found on the four data points.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Baby Boomer parents, Rodney and Paula Stanley, who instilled in me during my formative years a love for learning that has carried me through my academic, professional, and life journeys. Their love and support have encouraged me to continue pursuing my dreams and goals.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's diverse workplace is comprised of individuals of different genders, races, religions, and backgrounds. In the past 15 years, another factor has become a topic of focus in workplace diversity – generational differences. Four generations are working side-by-side in today's organizations (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Traditional hierarchical structures that formerly kept generations separate have shifted to an interdependent model that requires members of different generations to work together more closely and intimately (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). Such generational diversity and interaction has the potential to foster creativity and diverse thought, which can benefit an organization's bottom line. On the other hand, just as with other aspects of diversity, generational differences can also cause misunderstandings and confusion, creating tension and conflict between team members (Zemke et al., 2000). The stress this invokes on employees negatively impacts the organization through lowered productivity, unwanted turnover, and poor customer service (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Add the ingredient of change to generational diversity, and the scene becomes more complex and potentially more dysfunctional.

Resistance to change stems from fear of the unknown and giving up what is known (Belgard, 2004; Jarrett, 2004). Fears associated with change are a natural part of the change process and can often be predicted to allow leaders to identify appropriate solutions to a problem (Conner, 1993; deJager, 2001). Conner (1993) stated that thinking ahead of time about the extent of resistance people might feel to a change allows leaders

to tailor the message so that people's fears are addressed. When it comes to generational diversity, the challenge is addressing people's fears based on their generational inclinations to resist or embrace change, which are likely to be different (See Egri & Ralston, 2004; Zemke et al., 2000). deJager claims that instead of change being blindly accepted, resistance requires an individual to provide sound justification for imposing change, which makes for better decision-making for the organization. To members of Generation X who are used to sharing their diverse views with others, this explanation of resistance-for-justification may seem appropriate, while to a member of the Silent generation, such resistance may be perceived as disregarding authority depending on who suggests the change.

At the same time, resistance to change can lead to behaviors that impede on change initiatives (Lines, 2004). According to Diamond (1986), in change events, resistance must be addressed in order to implement appropriate strategies and interventions. The implications of not managing change effectively include disruptions in productivity and morale and wasted resources and time (Kotter, 1996). To a greater extent, unsuccessful change initiatives don't become an embedded part of the organizational culture, and therefore, people continue to operate according to the "old way" of doing things (Kotter, 1996). Generally, less than 70% of major change initiatives are successful (Maurer, 2003). According to McCarthy (2004), common reasons why change initiatives fail include failure to plan ahead for people performance, failure to engage front-line managers, failure to engage the hearts and minds of employees through communication, failure to address "what's in it for me?" with regard to employees, failure to measure engagement of the people, and failure to assign a project manager.

Thinking about this need in relation to generations begs the question, are different generations equally resistant to change? If the answer is yes, then a common set of strategies and interventions may be appropriate; however, if all generations are not created equal in relation to resistance to change, then generational consideration may need to be given in identifying different strategies and interventions to minimize resistance to change.

Background of the Study

According to Strauss and Howe (1991), generations enter each life stage through their own generational personality. While all humans experience the same life stages in an entire life cycle – birth, school age years, moving out of parent’s house, getting married, having children, becoming a grandparent, and death – each generation experiences those life stages differently, through their own generational lens. “There is no such thing as one universal lifecycle,” said Strauss and Howe (p. 34). Instead, generations are shaped by “age location.” Based on Karl Mannheim’s theory of generations, Strauss & Howe defined age location as the age of a particular generation when major events occur that essentially shape or influence a generation’s behaviors and attitudes. The collective behaviors and attitudes that result comprise the generation’s peer personality and exist throughout the lifecycle of that generation. Economical, political, social, sociological, and demographical circumstances shape a generation’s values and personality (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). Zemke et al. (2000) indicated that “the music that members of a cohort hear, the heroes they share, the

passions they agree or disagree about, and their common history shape and define a generation (p. 16).

Peer personality is established during the formative (childhood) and “coming of age” years, the latter being the time between youth and adulthood (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Peer personality shapes the generation’s attitudes and behaviors toward “family life, sex roles, institutions, politics, religion, lifestyle, and the future” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p.63). The four generations in the workplace today – the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials – each have their own unique personality that they bring to the workplace and often view other generations negatively (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

For the Silent generation, whose significant experiences included the Great Depression and World War II, the generational personality includes loyalty, patriotism, working together for the collective group, and faith in large institutions (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). The outward focus of group unity with the Silent generation turned inward with the next generation, the Baby Boomers. A booming post-war economy and a renewed adoration for post-war babies shaped the values of the Baby Boomer generation toward optimism and a focus on personal gratification (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). They were raised to pursue their dreams and idealistic principles, which led them to challenge the status quo and place obsessive focus on themselves. Unlike the Silents, Boomers had little faith in government or large institutions, with events such as the Vietnam War and Watergate.

The generation following the baby boom is referred to as Generation X and is considered a lost or invisible generation (Zemke et al., 2000). These kids grew up amongst high divorce rates, a struggling economy, and neglect from parents who put career and other personal fulfillment before family. They tend to be skeptical and don't trust institutions, especially corporate America who dismissed their parents and other adults in mass layoffs during the 1980s. Finally, the Millennials are the newest generation to enter the workforce. Like the Boomers, they were wanted and adored and as a result are sociable and confident individuals (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). Having grown up with a computer in the home, technology comes naturally to these young people. They have lived busy, planned lives with parents serving as advocates for these children. In the workplace, they may turn out to be high-maintenance.

Each of these generations brings its unique perspectives, values, and attitudes to the workplace. As organizations deal with matters of change, these generational differences may become a factor in how efficiently leaders manage that change. As mentioned earlier, thinking ahead about the extent of resistance people might feel to a change will allow leaders to tailor the message so that people's fears and resistance to change are addressed (Conner, 1993). Should resistance to change be found to vary between the generations, different change strategies may be necessary in terms of planning ahead for people performance, engaging front-line managers, engaging the hearts and minds of employees through communication, and addressing "what's in it for me?" with regard to employees where different generations are involved (McCarthy, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Several authors provided qualitative support for different responses to change amongst the generations; however, little empirical evidence has been cited. For example, Zemke et al. (2000) described the Silent generation as being inept with change, preferring predictability, consistency, and stability based on their experience as children of the Great Depression and World War II. Martin (2004) anecdotally described the Silent generation as being skeptical of changes in the healthcare industry, viewing the changes as radical. Conversely, Zemke et al. (2000) described Generation X as being adept and comfortable with change. Growing up under conditions that required them to be flexible and adaptable, Gen Xers are thought to thrive on challenges and opportunities (Martin, 2004). Similarly, feelings of security within the Baby Boomer generation during an affluent post-war economy led to values of openness to change, as shown by support for the Civil Rights and women's movements (Egri & Ralston, 2004).

While the explanations for how each generation responds to change sound reasonable, empirical evidence is necessary to validate these claims. Furthermore, empirical evidence is needed to determine if generational differences need to be considered as organizational leaders address change within their organizations. According to Kotter (1996), the need for business executives to successfully manage change within their organizations remains strong as change is necessary to grow the business, remain competitive, and ultimately increase value for shareholders. A study on values by Egri and Ralston (2004) provided some empirical support that Gen Xers are more open to change than Baby Boomers who are more open to change than the Silent generation; however, the data from this study was 11 years old at the time it was

published and doesn't include information on the Millennial generation. The topic of this study, therefore, was to provide empirical support that showed whether or not differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace – Silent, Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial. This information can then be used for future research to determine what strategies and approaches should be used with the different generations to minimize resistance to change.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if differences between generations exist in terms of resistance to change in the workplace. Various approaches have been identified for minimizing resistance to change, including communication (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979), participation (Lines, 2004; Msweli-Mbanga & Potwana, 2006; Sagie, Elizur, & Koslowsky, 1990), and alignment to personal goals (e.g., Guth & MacMillan, 1986). These approaches, however, were offered as general solutions without taking into consideration the diversity of the individuals within the organization.

For this study, generational diversity specifically was examined in relation to resistance to change, where an intergenerational difference may create conflict that managers need to address or where lack of significant difference may reinforce the methods managers use to minimize resistance to change within their groups. The objective of this study was to provide empirical evidence to either support or reject the claim that differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace. The results of this study not only provide managers and leaders with information that will help them make better decisions regarding how to deal with change

in their organizations, it also contributes to the field of research that has been conducted on generations, as well as to the field of research on change management, specifically resistance to change.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The two variables examined in this study – generations and resistance to change – were both supported by well-developed theories. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory (1979) and Mannheim’s theory of generations (1952) both provided a theoretical framework in which to study the phenomenon of generations, explaining how members of a generation tend to adopt similar values and attitudes based on the sociological influences that occur at each major stage of life. The second aspect of the theoretical framework that was relevant to this study pertained to resistance to change, which is outlined in Lewin’s Field Theory (1948). Each of these theories is discussed further in the following sections.

Ecological Theory

Ecological theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) to explain the interrelationship between individual development and environmental systems (Rogoff, 2003; Turner, 1996; Vander Zanden, 2003). The main premise of the theory is that individuals respond and adapt to changes in the environment over time, which influences their overall human development. Cognitive interpretation of the environment helps individuals make sense of the world around them and ultimately drives behavior (Vander Zanden, 2003). As individuals develop and gain more experiences, their responses to the same environmental contexts may change. Vander Zanden (2003) used the example of a

person who is likely to respond differently to a movie about war after that individual has participated in a war.

Environmental contexts vary based on proximity to the individual. Some environmental contexts, such as family units and peers, are closer to the individual and have a more direct, interpersonal impact. Other contexts, such as societal culture, are further in proximity, and thus have a broader, but no less important impact.

Bronfenbrenner categorized the different environmental contexts according to the level of influence on the individual. The four categories are microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems (Rogoff, 2003; Turner, 1996).

These systems can be thought of as smaller circles inside of larger ones (like an archery target) with the individual in the middle (See Figure 1).

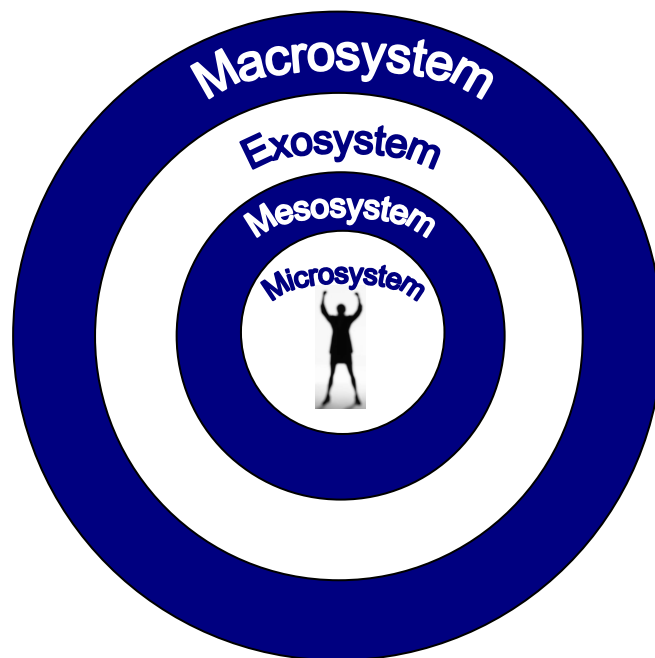


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory.

The smallest, innermost circle that surrounds the individual represents the microsystem, which is comprised of direct environmental contexts, such as home, school, neighborhood, and church. The next circle out is the mesosystem, which looks at the relationships between the microsystems. That is, the mesosystem addresses the complementary or conflicting nature of the microsystems, such as that which occurs between home and school (Rogoff, 2003). The next larger circle is the exosystem, which pertains to environmental contexts with which the individual does not have direct contact. Factors within the exosystem influence the microsystems, which then influence the individual. For example, a welfare system or school board may be part of the exosystem (Turner, 1996). Lastly, the largest outermost circle is the macrosystem. The macrosystem embodies the culture or subculture where the individual lives. This environmental context is important because it shapes individuals' values, beliefs, and attitudes (Turner, 1996).

To describe how changes affect an individual's development over time in the context of environmental influences, Bronfenbrenner incorporated the concept of the chronosystem into his theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). A simple form of a chronosystem involves both normative and non-normative transition periods in a person's life that affect human development. Normative transitions are those that pertain to life stages, such as starting school or reaching puberty, while non-normative transitions are influential changes in a person's life that are not necessarily part of life stage, such as an illness or a death in the family. A more advanced form of a chronosystem is that which takes into consideration how the sequence of transitions in a human's life contributes to development.

Since its introduction, ecological theory has evolved, with Bronfenbrenner renewing the importance of the biopsychological aspect of the individual as part of the theory. Bronfenbrenner renamed the theory the bioecological model and focused on proximal processes that drive development over a human lifespan. Proximal processes are essentially enduring forms of interaction that occur over time, such as ongoing behaviors of nurturing, learning, playing, etc. According to Bronfenbrenner (2000), “the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristic of the developing *person*; the *environment* – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the *developmental outcomes* under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over *time* through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived” (p. 130). The theory indicates that biological (i.e., genetic) predispositions have the potential to be developmental outcomes, and are only realized when appropriate proximal processes are carried out. According to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, proximal processes are “the primary engines of effective development” and “the mechanisms through which human genetic potentials for psychological functioning are actualized” (p. 572).

Proximal processes have a more powerful effect in environments that are stable and have resources, rather than in those that are disorganized and dysfunctional (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). In terms of resources, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci specifically looked at differences between advantaged and disadvantaged families, where opportunity structures may be provided for the advantaged group more readily than for the disadvantaged group. The absence of appropriate resources by family members may

prevent them from carrying out the appropriate proximal processes, which then negatively impacts individual development. In addition, instability is counterproductive to proximal processes and can occur at various levels in the environment, such as divorce at the family level or stressful situations created by societal change. Instability can undermine the benefits of proximal processes being introduced to drive effective human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). According to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, “Indeed, it is environmental conditions and events originating from outside the family that are likely to be the most powerful and pervasive disrupters of family processes affecting human development throughout the life course” (p. 576).

In Bronfenbrenner and Ceci’s (1994) introduction of bioecological theory, they highlighted the notion that family influences (proximal processes) can have a strong effect on human development and can even override other environmental factors, such as socioeconomic status. Instability, however, can undermine the benefits of proximal processes, leaving environmental conditions and events to become the predominant factors in shaping human development. “Indeed, it is environmental conditions and events originating from outside the family that are likely to be the most powerful and pervasive disrupters of family processes affecting human development throughout the life course” (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p. 576). While proximal processes are of interest to psychologists as a matter of enhancing human development at the individual level, the interest in proximal processes to the study of generations is the influence they have on developmental outcomes that shape values, attitudes, and beliefs, and the sociological impact that results.

Ecological theory describes how individual attitudes, beliefs, and values develop in the context of a generation because 1) similar proximal processes are being introduced (which have been shown to reduce differences between groups like those of different socioeconomic status), and 2) overarching instability in one or more of the environmental levels disrupts the proximal processes within the family. For example, World War II took over 60% of the male G.I. and Silent generation populations to war (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). The absence of the male parent in so many American homes during this time led to similar disruptions in the family structure for individual families, which then impacted human development. Baby Boomers at this same age experienced something different, where many families experienced prosperity and doted upon their children. A significant number of Gen Xers, on the other hand, experienced the effects of divorced parents and two income households, which led many of them to be latch key kids. With generations, similar influences occurred to individuals during these key life stages that resulted in similar developmental outcomes, as described in Mannheim's generational theory.

Generational Theory

In his essay *The Problem of Generations*, Mannheim (1952) claimed that a generation does not participate in a universal lifecycle, but rather is developed based on the common political, economical, and sociological influences that occur during key life stages between birth and death. These influences create shared experiences for individuals at the same formative stages of life, thus shaping the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the group as a whole. For example, children who observed the war effort

during World War II shared a similar experience as observers, while those who were coming of age during these years possibly participated in the war.

According to Mannheim (1952), the sociological problem of generations is the conflict that arises as new generations come into the world. Essentially, the experiences that are passed down from one generation to another are only received inasmuch as they are useful to the newer generation. Also, experiences of one generation are less impacting to a newer generation that didn't gain that experience first-hand, but rather only heard about it. In other words, the same event leads to different subjective experiences for the different generations based on the age location of each generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Mannheim stated, "At any given point in time we must always sort out the individual voices of the various generations, each attaining that point in time in its own way" (p. 283). Mannheim stated that only those who share these same experiences have membership of a generation in actuality.

Force Field Theory

Force Field Theory was developed by Kurt Lewin (1948) to explain how change is influenced by two opposing factors – driving and restraining forces – that work against each other to sustain a state of stability (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996; Perseus Publishing Staff, 2002; Schein, 2002). While driving forces promote change, restraining forces oppose the driving forces and thus hinder change. When these forces are balanced, a state of quasi-stationary equilibrium is achieved (See Figure 2).

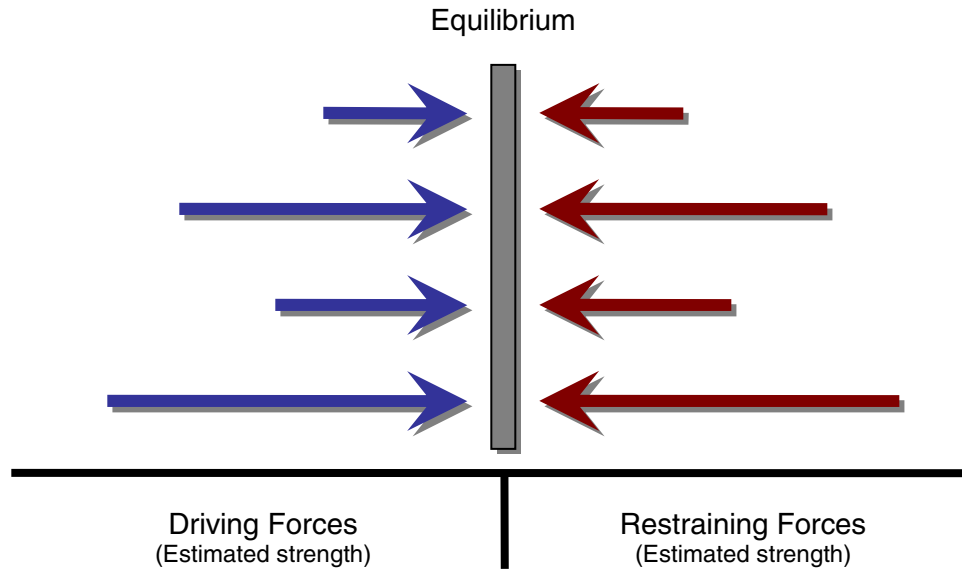


Figure 2. Lewin's Force Field Theory

The term 'quasi-stationary equilibrium' was used to describe the stable routine of day-to-day activity, rather than just 'equilibrium' which implies a state of rest (Perseus Publishing Staff, 2002). According to Schein (2002), "Any living system is always in a state of some change (growth, metamorphosis, or decline), but all systems are homeostatic in that they always tend toward some kind of equilibrium" (p. 35). These systems include social, organizational, interpersonal, and groups (Lewin, 1948; Perseus Publishing Staff, 2002). To explain the quasi-stationary state, Lewin used the analogy of a river flowing at the same velocity and direction over time. Although the river is not at rest, it flows consistently at the same rate and thus is stable. A shift in velocity or direction, however, would constitute a change.

To bring about change, either driving forces need to be added or restraining forces must be diminished. Adding more driving forces "is likely to be paralleled by higher

aggressiveness, higher emotionality, and lower constructiveness” than if restraining forces were reduced; therefore, the latter is a more desirable course of action (Lewin, 1948, p. 280). In addition, adding driving forces is likely to result in new restraining forces as people try to maintain a state of quasi-stationary equilibrium (Perseus Publishing Staff, 2002). In this study, force field theory provided the theoretical framework for the variable of resistance to change in that it posited the tendency for groups to maintain a state of stability with restraining forces (i.e. resistance) resulting when driving forces that promote change are introduced.

Hypotheses

The literature suggested various differences between the generations, including different levels of resistance to change. Based on these described differences in the literature, the following null and alternative hypotheses were tested.

H₀: Average resistance to change in the workplace is the same for members of each of the generations.

H_A: Differences exist between generations in terms of average resistance to change in the workplace.

Lawler and Worley (2006) believe that, in general, resistance to change falls on a normal distribution with the majority of people resisting change on a case-by-case basis. They claimed that the right environment needs to be established for effective change and not that individuals thrive on change. On the other hand, Zemke et al. (2000) claimed that Gen Xers do thrive on change based on their early experiences that required them to adapt and be flexible, such as living in two households with different sets of rules

throughout the week as a result of divorced parents, taking care of themselves and younger siblings as latch key kids, and growing up with the knowledge that loyalty didn't prevent them from being laid off by a company as they saw happen to their parents in the 1980s.

At the same time, Zemke et al. (2000) claimed that Silents are inept at change. Their preference for consistency, uniformity, and order (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), as well as validated work practices (Martin, 2004) suggest that, of the four generations in the work place, the Silent generation would have the greatest resistance to change. For example, Martin (2004) claimed that members of the Silent generation are skeptical of changes going on in the healthcare industry, viewing the changes as radical. Egri & Ralston (2004) found that members of the Silent generation held values that relate to “self-control, safety, and stability in societal and personal relationships, and to respecting cultural traditions” (p. 211).

Anecdotally, Gen Xers and Silents are on opposite ends of the spectrum with regard to resistance to change, and based on the literature, it seems that Boomers and Millennials are somewhere in the middle. Egri & Ralston (2004) found that Boomers value openness to change, and attribute that value to growing up feeling secure in the world. Likewise, Boomers grew up in a time of rapid change (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), which suggests that they would be more receptive to change than their Silent counterparts. At the same time, Boomers experienced these rapid changes in a stable environment, whereas Gen Xers learned to adapt to change in an unstable environment. Therefore, it seems that Baby Boomers would be more resistant to change than Gen Xers. Findings from a study by Egri and Ralston (2004) supported this by showing that Baby

Boomers and Gen Xers attributed higher importance to openness to change than did Silents, with Gen Xers showing higher attribution than Baby Boomers.

Millennials are still relatively new to the workforce. Based on the rapid changes in technology during their formative years, as well as having to adapt to the increase in violence in the schools, change is not foreign to this generation. At the same time, Millennials are a protected and wanted generation, which like the Baby Boomers, created a more stable environment for them that required less adaptation than that which Gen Xers are familiar. For that reason, it seems that Millennials would be less resistant to change than members of the Silent and Baby Boomer generations, and more resistant than Gen Xers. Based on this information, additional and more specific hypotheses were also tested.

H₁: The Silent generation will have the highest average resistance to change score on the Resistance to Change scale of all four generations.

H₂: The Baby Boomer generation will have a lower average resistance to change score on the Resistance to Change scale than members of the Silent generation, and a higher average score than Generation Xers and Millennials.

H₃: Generation X will have the lowest average resistance to change score on the Resistance to Change scale of all four generations.

H₄: The Millennial generation will have a lower average resistance to change score than members of the Silent and Baby Boomer generations, and a higher average score than Generation Xers.

Assuming Lawler and Worley are correct in that resistance to change falls on a normal distribution with the majority of people resisting change on a case-by-case basis,

then do generational differences matter? That is, does resistance to change bypass generational differences or can patterns be found between generations along this normal distribution? This study addressed these questions by testing these hypotheses.

Significance of the Study

Managers play a key role in helping employees understand changes in the organization (Caldwell, 2003) and employees' feelings toward front-line managers were found to be pivotal in change management success (McCarthy, 2004). As recognized change agents, managers will find it necessary to expand their management skill sets to include the necessary leadership behaviors for change success (Kotter, 1996). Recognizing the different generational personalities and understanding how each group looks at the world, approaches work, and develops relationships with others, are necessary skills to avoid conflict and lost productivity.

This study is important because it showed whether the generations currently in the workplace differ with regard to resistance to change. Understanding generational differences in terms of resistance to change guide the use of appropriate interventions in the change management process to more successfully address each employee's concerns (also referred to as WIIFM, or what's in it for me?) (Stanley, 2002; McCarthy, 2004). According to Lancaster and Stillman (2002), generational misunderstandings are frequent on both the personal and institutional levels. "The ramifications of these generational collisions at work include everything from reduced profitability to the loss of valuable employees, higher payroll costs, poor customer service, derailed careers, wasted human potential, and even potentially serious health problems caused by stress" (Lancaster &

Stillman, 2002, p. 13). Such differences can undermine a change initiative, simply because generational misunderstandings haven't been addressed. For example, a Baby Boomer manager who is responsible for implementing a change may become frustrated by a member of the Silent generation who is demonstrating resistance behaviors. According to McCarthy (2004), the lack of planning for change with regard to the people leads to lower productivity and morale and is identified as one of the top reasons change initiatives fail.

This study is also significant because it contributes to the fields of research being conducted on both generational diversity and change management. To this researcher's knowledge, no study has been conducted to address resistance to change from a generational perspective. Lastly, this study includes the Millennial generation. Due to their newness to the workplace, not many studies have been conducted on all four generations.

Definition of Terms

Generations

Various names have been given to each of the generations. For example, Zemke et al. (2000) referred to the population born between 1922 and 1943 as the Veteran generation, while Strauss & Howe (1991) referred to this group as the Silent generation. Similarly, Generation X is also known as the 13th generation, and the Millennials are also referred to as Generation Y and Nexters. For the purpose of this study, the generations were referred to as Silent, Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial.

In addition to what each generation is called, there is a lack of consistency in the literature in the timeframe used to define a particular generation (Markert, 2004). While Zemke et al. (2000) used 1922 – 1943 to denote the Silent generation, the more commonly used timeframe was 1925 – 1942 (Hill, 2004; Reynolds, 2005; Strauss & Howe, 1991). For Baby Boomers, the timeframes used were 1946 – 1964 (Egri & Ralston, 2004; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Martin, 2004), 1943 – 1964 (Hill, 2004; Reynolds, 2005); and 1943 – 1960 (Zemke et al., 2000). The timeframes used for Generation X included 1965 – 1980 (Hill, 2004; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002) and 1960-61 – 1980-81 (Reynolds, 2005; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). For the Millennials, even more disagreement exists with regards to timeframes. Some used 1981 – 1999 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), 1980 – 2000 (Zemke et al., 2000), and even 1982 – 1993 (Reynolds, 2005) and 1978 – 1988 (Hill, 2004). This lack of consistency presented a challenge in identifying the appropriate timeframe for each generation.

The difficulty in assigning timeframes was due to the subjective nature of identifying the events that take place to shape the values and attitudes of a generation. In addition, babies are born everyday in a continuous cycle. As Zemke et al. (2000) stated: “There are no hard stops or road signs indicating when one generation ends and another begins” (p. 3). Zemke et al. (2000) also claimed that they would overlap the start and end dates of each generation by three or four years if they thought that it wouldn’t confuse people in order to demonstrate the *emergence* of new generations rather than a fixed start. In order to empirically study generations; however, a timeframe for each of the generations had to be established.

For this study, Strauss and Howe's (1991) timeframes were used because these authors articulated at length an identified recurring pattern of generational personalities in America. Other authors claimed that their timeframes were selected based on their own research but don't provide details to support why each timeframe was selected. Still others don't provide any explanation at all. Therefore, the generations were defined as follows. The Silent generation included individuals in the U.S. who were born between 1925 and 1942. The Baby Boomer generation was made up of individuals in the U.S. who were born between 1943 and 1960. Generation X included those in the U.S. born between 1961 – 1981, and the Millennial generation included those in the U.S. born between 1982 – 2000.

Resistance to change

At a high level, Watson (1971) defined resistance to change as “all forces which contribute to stability in personality or in social systems” (p. 745). These are equivalent to the restraining forces in Lewin's force field theory, which work against the driving forces to sustain a quasi-stationary equilibrium. At an individual level, others defined resistance to change as a natural reaction that occurs as a result of withdrawal from the status quo (Belgard, 2004; Conner, 1998, as cited in Gravenhorst & Veld, 2004). Specific to the workplace, Lines (2004) defined resistance to change as “behaviours that are acted out by change recipients in order to slow down or terminate an intended organizational change” (p. 198), which also suggest that the resistant behavior is a result of trying to maintain the status quo.

In this study, resistance to change was examined as a dispositional factor amongst individuals from the various generations, rather than being viewed as specific behaviors

that result from resistance to a specific change event. For this study, Conner's (1998) definition of resistance to change was the most fitting, which is a "natural reaction of people to anything that significantly upsets their status quo (p.126)" (Conner, 1998, as cited in Gravenhorst & Veld, 2004, p. 320).

Assumptions and Limitations

Several assumptions and limitations related to the scope of the study as well as to the methodology. First, the purpose of this study was to determine if differences *between* generations exist in terms of resistance to change in the workplace; therefore, differences *within* generations were not examined. Second, according to Mannheim (1952), generations are historically and culturally contextual. That is, a generation is defined only inasmuch as the members of that generation share common political, economical, and sociological experiences during key life stages. To account for shared historical and cultural contexts that contribute to generational development, the scope of this study was limited to U.S. workers. An associated assumption to this narrowed scope was that, based on Mannheim's generational theory, the sample of U.S. workers has a shared U.S. historical and cultural context.

Similarly, an assumption was made that the results of this study were based on generational differences rather than life stages. Life stage theory suggests that there are universal life stages and that groups of people will have similar experiences as they reach each of their developmental stages (i.e., childhood, youth, young adult, middle adulthood, and old age) (Egri & Ralston, 2004). This implies that people could become more or less resistant to change as they get older and pass through the different life stages.

Generational theory, on the other hand, proposes that while all humans experience the same life stages in an entire life cycle, each generation experiences those stages differently through their own generational lens (Strauss & Howe, 1991). In addition, the unique set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors possessed by each generation “remain relatively stable throughout a generation’s lifetime” (Egri & Ralston, 2004, p. 210). In contrast to life stage theory, generational theory suggests that the extent to which a generation will experience resistance to change will remain consistent throughout the generation’s lifetime. A longitudinal and cross-sectional study by Schaie, Labouvie, and Buech (1973) provided evidence that supports the assumption of generational theory over life stage theory. In looking at intellectual ontogeny and testing the perception that cognitive ability declines as one ages, they found that cognitive functioning remained stable throughout most of adulthood. They concluded that differences found between age groups, at least in terms of cognitive ability, were due to generational differences rather than chronological age differences. Of importance to the assumptions in this study was the evidence that generational differences do exist and that making life stage claims based on cross-sectional data comparing age groups can lead to inaccurate conclusions.

For the methodology, a purposive sample was used due to the infeasibility of obtaining a random sampling frame for all workers in the U.S. While a non-probability sample met the objective of this study, which was to provide empirical evidence to either support or reject the claim that differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace, such a sample did not allow generalizations to be made for the entire U.S. workforce population. Although conclusions may not be generalized, an assumption of the selected sample was that the diversity of organizations participating in

the study enhanced the representativeness of the sample. More detail regarding the sample is provided in Chapter 3, which explains the methodology of the study.

Distribution of the survey instrument used in this study was facilitated online, which had some limitations. First, not all participants regularly use a computer for their job, and therefore, there was some concern that those individuals would not readily respond to an online survey. To overcome this obstacle, it was confirmed that all employees had access to the email and the Intranet (either at their own desk or at a shared location), the survey was made available for three weeks, and reminder emails were sent to those who didn't respond.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature pertaining to resistance to change and generations. Chapter 3 describes the methodology that was used to conduct this study. Chapter 4 shows the results of the data analysis, and Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study and discussion of the results.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the literature on resistance to change using the four-facet structure outlined by Oreg (2003). The four facets include routine seeking, emotional reaction to imposed change, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity (Oreg, 2003). In addition, this chapter provides a review of the literature that discusses the different generations that currently make up the U.S. workforce – Silent Generation (born between 1925-1942), Baby Boomers (born between 1943-1960), Generation X (born between 1961-1981), and Millennials (born between 1982-2000). Specifically, the events and conditions during each generation’s formative years are discussed in relation to how they contributed to shaping the values and attitudes of each generation and how these values play out for each generation in the workplace.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change has been studied from a variety of perspectives. Some studied it from the perspective of cognitive development (Diamond, 1986; Lau & Woodman, 1995), while others focused on dispositional factors associated with resistance to change (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Conner, 1993; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). For example, Judge et al. (1999) studied how dispositional factors affected managers’ ability to cope with organizational change and found that positive self-concept and risk tolerance were positively associated with managers’ ability to cope. In studying college freshman, Aspinwall and Taylor (1992) found the dispositional factor

of optimism to be positively associated with adjustment to college. More recently, a contextual perspective has been taken to study the influence of environmental factors and participation on resistance to, or rather acceptance of, change (Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, & DiFonzo, 2004; Lines, 2004; Sagie et al., 1990; Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Because this study looked at differences between generations in terms of resistance to change in the workplace based on the peer personalities of each generation, a dispositional perspective was most appropriate for this study. A dispositional perspective describes the inclination or tendency each generation has to be resistant to change regardless of context, which was the objective of this study. Oreg (2003) identified a four-facet structure to the disposition of resistance to change – routine seeking, emotional reaction to imposed change, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity – which provided a framework in which to review the literature on resistance to change from a dispositional perspective.

Routine Seeking

Routine seeking is one factor of the four-facet structure to the disposition of resistance to change outlined by Oreg (2003). The two main sources of routine seeking disposition described by Oreg include reluctance to give up old habits and preference for low levels of stimulation and novelty.

Reluctance to Give Up Old Habits

People tend to stick with what's familiar (Watson, 1971) and may respond to threats in the environment by drawing on familiar beliefs and methods rather than relying on uncertain actions (Miller, Droge, & Vickery, 1997). According to Kanter (1985),

change requires people to address habits and routines. At an individual level, people form habits by repeating behaviors in a stable environment (Wood, Quinn, Kashy, 2002). While a new behavior is originally performed with thought and intention, the act of repetition leads to less focus and thought being required for future performance. Once a behavior becomes a habit, it can often occur without intention. Habits are an “efficient, nontaxing mode of initiating and controlling daily activities” that can “be performed quickly, in parallel with other activities, and with the allocation of minimal focal attention” (Wood et al., 2002, p. 1282). Change, however, instigates an unstable environment or context where a new or different response is necessary. This requires additional thought and effort.

Reluctance to give up old habits may also stem from increased emotional intensity associated with non-habit behaviors. According to Wood et al. (2002), emotional responses are more likely to occur with non-habits due to plans and organized behaviors being interrupted, difficulties and unfamiliarity associated with new or infrequently performed behaviors, and disconnects between the new behaviors and self-goals. In addition, feelings associated with loss of control may be prompted by the deliberation necessary to perform non-habit behaviors (Wood et al., 2002).

At the organizational level, routine seeking behavior is fostered through organizational norms, routine, and culture. Gilbert (2005) defined organizational routines as “repeated patterns of response involving interdependent activities that become reinforced through structural embeddedness and repeated use” (p. 742). Gilbert further explained how organizations demonstrate routine rigidity by not adapting operating routines to external changes. In studying the impact of external threat on routine rigidity,

Gilbert found that routine rigidity was increased in the midst of threat, with managers adhering to behaviors that were more familiar. Based on an ethnographic study of a high-tech manufacturing organization, Howard-Grenville (2005) argued that organizational routines are more difficult to change when they are embedded and overlap with other structures in the organization, whereas routines that are peripheral are less difficult to change. Similarly, Bresnen, Goussevskaia, and Swan (2005) found organizational routines and norms influenced the acceptance and resistance to change based on how well the change aligned to already existing routines and practices at four project-based companies.

Belgard (2004) compared company norms to an addiction. “People consistently repeat accepted patterns of behavior and receive, in return, their ‘fix’ of promotions, favorable reviews, more flexible work arrangements, and inclusion in critical meetings” (p. 137). According to Lines (2004), resistance to change will be greater when the change is in contrast to organizational norms than if it aligns with organizational norms. An organization’s culture will affect the extent to which change is accepted based on how well-aligned the change is to the cultural norms and values, how strong the culture is, and the history of previous change initiatives (Conner, 1993; Lines, 2004).

Preference for Low Levels of Stimulation and Novelty

Kirton (1976) contended that individuals respond to problems with a tendency to either adapt or innovate. Adaptors are individuals who look for solutions within existing and familiar structures, while innovators are those who tend to look for solutions that are different and novel. Adaptors prefer familiarity and conform to rules, social norms, and

accepted work patterns. Innovators, on the other hand, are less likely to conform, preferring new ideas. When it comes to change, adaptors tend to support change that fits within the existing structures and paradigms (Kirton, Bailey, & Glendinning, 1991). Innovators, on the other hand, prefer radical versus evolutionary change, challenging existing structures and paradigms. In large scale changes specifically, innovators are especially essential to break patterns of routine seeking behavior (Barczak, Smith, & Wilemon, 1987).

Emotional Reaction to Imposed Change

The second factor in Oreg's (2003) four-facet structure of resistance to change is people's emotional reaction to imposed change, which includes reluctance to lose control and lack of psychological resilience.

Reluctance to Lose Control

An individual's reluctance to lose control has been identified as one of the main reasons why people resist change (Conner, 1993; Kanter, 1985; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). People must feel that they have control over their actions (Diamond, 1986) and have a natural tendency to keep their psychological states consistent (Watson, 1971). When people feel that control has been taken from them, they will focus their attention and energy on re-establishing order and gaining back the control that they feel they lost (Bordia et al., 2004; Conner, 1993). Resistance is a way for people to feel in control of their own actions. Watson claimed that resistance to change will be minimized when the change doesn't threaten individuals' autonomy or security and when individuals participate in the change.

Top-down driven change initiatives can threaten feelings of control because the changes are perceived as being forced onto the organization without giving people a choice. Command-and-control organizational structures in general reinforce resistance to change because they create an environment where individuals feel they must protect their self-esteem and security (Diamond, 1986). In these situations, the control lies with the initiators of the change, and resistance to change results as different groups “concentrate on the preservation of their own interests, goals, and positions” (Boonstra, 2004, p. 3). In terms of generations, the extent of resistance may vary because each generation has its own set of interests and goals, as well as different trust levels in institutions and authority. Alternatively, Watson (1971) suggested that people resist change because of what he referred to as an “illusion of impotence”, meaning that people tend to feel that matters are beyond their influence of control and therefore don’t bother trying to make changes happen. George and Jones (2001) referred to this as learned helplessness, which is also a source of resistance to change.

The extent to which individuals believe they have control over change events is determined by their locus of control (Lau & Woodman, 1995). Those who have internal locus of control believe they have control over events, while those with external locus of control believe that others have that control. Based on evidence that an internal locus of control is associated with problem-solving coping strategies, Judge et al. (1999) studied the association of seven dispositional factors with coping with organization change. All seven factors, including internal locus of control, showed significant correlations with coping with organizational change. That is, individuals who have a dispositional tendency to believe that they have control over events are more likely to better cope with

organizational change than those who believe events are controlled by others. Wanberg and Banas (2000) also examined perceived control as one of three dispositional variables in their study on predictors and outcomes of openness to change. Their findings suggested that even when individuals do not have a positive view of the change event, their belief that they have control over how they are affected by the change results in greater change acceptance.

Lack of Psychological Resilience

Change is considered to be a stressor that threatens the psychological well-being of an individual (Bordia et al., 2004; Judge et al., 1999; Woodward & Hendry, 2004). According to Maddi (2002), the world today is in a state of great change that has disrupted the overall stability of our lives. As a result, “our individual existences have been greatly stressed, as shown in increasing levels of physical and mental illnesses, decreased job performance and morale, and increased substance abuse and violence” (p. 181). The ability to withstand or cope with stressors affects an individual’s physical and mental health, as well as performance (Maddi, 2002; Woodward & Hendry, 2004).

In the context of change, personal resilience refers to an individual’s ability to quickly achieve stability following a major change (Conner, 1993). People who demonstrate resilience are those who “regain their equilibrium faster, maintain a higher level of quality and productivity in their work, preserve their physical and emotional health, and achieve more of their goals” (Conner, 1993, Personal resilience, para. 4). Resilient people tend to minimize the negative effects of change on themselves and others by planning ahead and managing change. In addition, they understand that the

future will bring more change and are prepared to accept and accommodate that which is to come. Several cognitive and dispositional factors have been studied in terms of association to one's resilience to change, including cognitive schema (Lau & Woodman, 1995), ability to employ coping strategies (Judge et al., 1999), and openness to change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Resilience to change also involves coping with the psychological strain that develops as a result of the change event. Active coping strategies, such as problem-solving attitudes, lead to better handling and lower levels of stress, while avoidant strategies increase the risk of adverse responses to stress (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Tiong, 2005). In a study on how dispositional factors affect managers' abilities to cope with organization change, Judge et al. (1999) determined that positive self-concept and risk tolerance were positively related to coping with change. The two factors were comprised of specific dispositional factors that showed significant associations with coping with change. Positive self-concept included locus of control, positive affectivity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Risk tolerance included openness to experience, low risk aversion, and tolerance for ambiguity.

Openness to change has also been identified as a resilience factor that can reduce change resistance behaviors (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Wanberg and Banas (2000) found that individuals who reported higher self-esteem, perceived control, and optimism were more open to change. Furthermore, they found that individuals who experienced work-related irritation or an intention to quit were less open to change.

Cognitive Rigidity

A third factor of resistance to change identified by Oreg (2003) was cognitive rigidity. Cognition is separate but connected to disposition, in that disposition influences cognition and cognitive responses (Lau & Woodman, 1995; Smollan, 2006). Cognitive rigidity refers to “the tendency of an individual *not* to change” (Schultz & Searleman, 2002, p. 166). In contrast to rational resistance, which can be overcome through an explanation of benefits, cognitive rigidity is more like irrational resistance when people are unwilling to change simply because they don’t like change (deJager, 2001). Rigidity points to resistance in a single belief, whereas resistance to a *set* of beliefs, attitudes, or personal habits is referred to as dogmatism (Rokeach, 1960, as cited in Schultz & Searleman, 2002). Oreg (2003) states that “dogmatic individuals are characterized by rigidity and closed-mindedness and therefore might be less willing and able to adjust to new situations” (p. 681).

Cognitive rigidity stems from cognitive development of adaptive and defensive tendencies toward change that begin in infancy (Diamond, 1986). Adaptive tendencies are those that contribute to the development of social identity, maturity, and autonomy. Hardiness, for example, is an adaptive tendency that drives people to take advantage of opportunities that contain uncertainty, even when the current situation is comfortable (Maddi, 2002). Defensive tendencies, including resistance to change, help protect the individual against risks associated with change, such as avoiding anxiety and maintaining security (Diamond, 1986). These tendencies continue into early development and shape resistance to change in adulthood. According to Diamond, preconscious and unconscious resistance to change is an inherent response to protect the status quo.

People interpret and respond to change through their own change schema (George & Jones, 2001; Lau & Woodmen, 1995). Schemas, in general, are “abstract cognitive structures that contain knowledge about a kind of stimulus or concept, its features or attributes, and the interconnectedness between its attributes (George & Jones, 2001, p.421). People use cognitive schemas to make sense of circumstances in the environment around them and to make decisions about how to respond to those circumstances. In terms of change, an individual’s change schema is influenced by past experience with change, dispositional factors, general attitude, and commitment to an organization (Lau & Woodman, 1995). The results of Lau and Woodman’s study showed that people’s cognitive understanding of the change based on their change schemata influenced people’s attitudes towards the change.

According to George and Jones (2001), a quasi-stationary state, as discussed by Lewin (1948), is achieved when an individual’s schema is consistent with the environment. When change is initiated and stimuli occur that are contrary to a person’s schema, people will tend to hold on to what they know rather than change their schema. Any discrepancies between the change and an individual’s schema are often rationalized by the individual or made sense of without changing schema, with rationalization becoming stronger in group settings (i.e., group think). Change occurs when individuals’ schemas are changed (George & Jones, 2001). Based on what is known about generations and how shared experiences result in the development of shared schemata (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000), the results of Lau and Woodman’s study suggested that the change schemata for each generation would be similar amongst its members.

Short-term Focus

The fourth factor in resistance to change deals with short-term focus. Short-term focus stems from the notion that resistance to change is known to occur even when individuals know that the change will benefit them. Short-term focus is implicated by several of the other areas already discussed. For example, the extra effort and attention required during the initial stages of change to learn new behaviors and address old habits and routines requires patience and a focus on the long-term benefits. Intolerance for the adjustment period in the short term can lead to increased resistance to change (Oreg, 2003). In the same way, short-term focus is implicated by lack of personal resilience. Personal resilience by definition is the ability for individual to regain stability and productivity following a change (Conner, 1993), which is in direct contrast to intolerance for the adjustment period necessary for change. Finally, loss of control in the short-term can lead people to resist change as they struggle to regain control, even though long-term benefits of the change may be understood (Oreg, 2003).

Uncertainty is also a short-term result of change that can lead to resistance. According to Belgard (2004), fear of the unknown and giving up that which is know is what leads to resistance to change. People experience psychological discomfort with uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004; Kanter, 1985). In a study on the relationships between communication, uncertainty, control, and well-being, Bordia et al. (2004) found that uncertainty increased as one's perception of control decreased and vice versa. Judge et al. (1999) found that individuals who possessed tolerance for ambiguity were better able to cope with organizational change. Similarly, Tiong (2005) found that those who reported

higher tolerance for ambiguity during change reported lower levels of stress and higher levels of motivation for work.

Research question restated

Although the research literature does not say much specifically about the link between generational diversity and resistance to change, an extensive amount of literature was found on resistance to change and related topics, such as coping with change, openness to change, and change acceptance. Having looked at resistance to change, now is a good time to revisit the research question: Do differences exist between the four generations in the workplace in terms of resistance to change? The next section looks at a review of the literature on the four generations, including a description of the historical and cultural contexts in which each of the generations developed their unique personalities and an account of the different values, beliefs, and attitudes possessed by each of the generations.

Generations

Silent Generation

Generational Personality

In the early part of the twentieth century, the Great Depression and World War II were major world events that significantly impacted the people alive at that time. The children during this period generally grew up in economic hardship as high unemployment rates left families having to get by on very little. Oftentimes, simply putting food on the table was a challenge and standing in a soup line for a meal was not uncommon. From this experience, the children of this generation learned what it was like

to do without, which shaped future attitudes toward conservative spending (Hill, 2004; Saxby, 2004; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). The support provided by the government and other institutions during the Depression gave people hope and influenced a belief in institutions and the government that became part of this generation's personality (Dychtwald, 1999).

World War II was another value-shaping event for the children and youth of this generation, although authors disagree on the extent to which they were involved in the war effort. The discrepancy is important to note because this key event shaped the long-term values that were adopted by this generation and contributed to the generation's overall personality. Several authors referred to this group as the Silent Generation, citing birth years between 1925 and 1942 (Hill, 2004; Reynolds, 2005; Strauss and Howe, 1991). Starting the birth year at 1925 brings the oldest members of this generation to just 20 years old at the end of World War II. While older members of the Silent generation participated in the war effort, the majority were observers (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Strauss and Howe (1991) referred to this group as silent (hence the name "Silent Generation"), describing them as being stuck in between the G.I. Generation and the Baby Boomers, not being part of the celebrated war heroes of World War II (G.I. Generation) and not being adored as postwar babies (early Baby Boomers). Strauss and Howe (1991) claimed that "America offered young people peace and jobs, but put them in a social and cultural no-man's land" (p. 286).

Zemke et al. (2000), on the other hand, called this the Veteran Generation and expanded the timeframe to those born between 1922 and 1943. Expanding the timeframe by these few years makes more of this generation's youth eligible for military service

during World War II, with the eldest being age 23 at the end of the war. Whereas Strauss and Howe (1991) painted a picture of this silent group living under the shadow of the G.I. generation before it, Zemke et al. (2000) gave the first half of this generation credit for their contribution to the war effort, instilling generational core values of dedication, sacrifice, conformity, patience, hard work, and duty (Egri & Ralston, 2004; Martin, 2004; Zemke et al., 2000).

The second half of this generation is referred to as the “sandwich group” by Zemke et al. which is described more along the same lines as Strauss and Howe’s description of the entire generation. Many of this later group were involved with the Korean War during their coming of age years; however, this war did not have the same national response as World War II and service members didn’t receive the same reception as their fathers and older siblings (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). According to Strauss and Howe (1991), Silents were expected to conform to the previous generation’s ways and were not expected by their elders to achieve much. The Silent generation has never had a U.S. president.

Together, over 50% of the males in the G.I. and Silent generations served in the military (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), while 15 million Silent generation women took up work in the factories to produce tanks, planes, and artillery in support of the war effort (Zemke et al., 2000). This unity in a time of war generated in this generation a sense of patriotism and a belief in working for the collective group (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). They believe that teamwork is how to accomplish goals (Dychtwald, 1999).

Silents in the Workplace

Today, the Silent generation makes up roughly 3.5% of the U.S. workforce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Silents value being shown respect and like being involved in the workforce after retirement through part time or temporary employment (Reynolds, 2005).

The military style of leadership from the war effort resonated with this generation who brought it to the workplace. Top-down hierarchies were viewed as the most effective organizational structure, and leaders utilized command-and-control styles as ways of managing and leading others (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Martin, 2004; Zemke, 2000). As a result, Silent leaders are likely to command change when necessary and expect others to follow without question. While Silent employees may comply with direction from leaders due to their respect for authority and value of conformity, the extent of compliance may be limited depending on the extent to which the change requires Silent employees to step outside their level of comfort. The generational personality of the Silent group suggests they have a dispositional inclination to be more resistant to change than the other three generations, specifically in the context of three of the four facets of resistance to change – routine seeking, emotional reaction to imposed change, and cognitive rigidity – as discussed in the previous section.

According to Oreg (2003), a routine seeking disposition contributes to resistance to change. The Silent generation prefers to make decisions in the workplace based on practices that are tried and true (Zemke et al., 2000). They look at what's been successful as well as not so successful in the past to drive their actions. According to Kirton et al. (1991), those who prefer familiarity, conformity to rules, social norms, and accepted work patterns (all values of the Silent generation) tend to support change that fits within

existing structures and paradigms. When change occurs that affects organizational norms and routines, members of the Silent generation are likely to demonstrate resistance because the change threatens practices that are proven.

An emotional reaction to imposed change is the second dispositional factor for resistance to change outlined by Oreg (2003). The Silent generation prefers predictability, consistency, and stability based on their experiences as children of the Great Depression and World War II (Zemke et al., 2000); however, change instigates an unstable environment and increases emotional intensity (Wood et al., 2002). Loss of control contributes to an emotional reaction to imposed change. Those who cope well with change tend to believe that they have control over events, while those who believe others have that control do not cope as well (Lau & Woodman, 1995). Early experiences of the Silent generation showed others controlling events as the government and other institutions stepped in to help during some difficult times. These experiences may influence members of the Silent generation to believe that others higher than themselves in the workplace are the ones to have control over events that affect the organization, and that they themselves possess little, if any, control.

The third dispositional factor for resistance to change is cognitive rigidity (Oreg, 2003). According to Lau and Woodman (1995), individuals have a cognitive understanding of change based on their past experience with change, dispositional factors, general attitude, and commitment to an organization (Lau & Woodman, 1995). For the Silent generation, individuals' cognitive understanding of change was influenced by unstable conditions during childhood and coming of age years, creating a value of stability in this generation. In the workplace, this cognitive schema influences people's

attitudes towards organizational change (Lau & Woodman, 1995) and can contribute to resistance to change.

Short-term focus is the fourth dispositional factor for resistance to change outlined by Oreg (2003). In contrast to the other three factors, short term focus is not a characteristic of the Silent generation. This disposition describes people's intolerance for the adjustment period in the short term that can lead to increased resistance to change (Oreg, 2003); however, members of the Silent generation are willing to wait for rewards and benefits (e.g., Social Security, pensions) promised to them by institutions and trust in the organizations' ability to fund these benefits (Dychtwald, 1999; Reynolds, 2005).

Baby Boomers

Generational Personality

America was not prepared for the baby boom that occurred following World War II (Dychtwald, 1999). Between the years of 1943 and 1960 (some authors used 1946 to 1964), a significant influx occurred in the number of babies born, resulting in a generation of approximately 79 million members, almost twice that of the Silent generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991). America found itself lacking in the number of hospitals, schools, and homes that were available to accommodate the increase in child population (Dychtwald, 1999). Hospital hallways were often used as labor rooms, and school classrooms were overly crowded. Due to their large number, Boomers have had to compete for everything, from spots on sports teams and placement into one's college of choice to career opportunities after college (Dychtwald, 1999; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Reynolds, 2005).

The prosperity during the post-war economy allowed Boomers to grow up in affluence and optimism (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Reynolds, 2005). These post-war babies were more nurtured than previous generations by G.I. and early Silent mothers and were thought to be the generation to fix all that was wrong with the world (Zemke et al., 2000). In the early 1950s, the first family-friendly suburb was developed, and by the late 1950s, 46 million people resided in suburbia (Dychtwald, 1999). Boomers were raised with more freedoms and flexibility than previous generations and were encouraged to be idealistic (Lancaster, & Stillman, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Whereas the Silent generation believes in working together for the collective group, Boomers tend to be more individualistic, self-absorbed, and are interested in self-fulfillment, a tendency that has earned them the nickname, the “Me Generation” (Dychtwald, 1999; Egri & Ralston, 2004; Hill, 2004; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Reynolds, 2005). According to Dychtwald (1999), “In stark contrast to earlier generations who were more inclined to align with their neighborhood, platoon, employer, church, or political party, boomers have grown up with an overriding commitment to *themselves*, their immediate families, and their own *inner drives*” (p. 209).

The combination of idealism with key events that occurred during Boomers’ coming of age years, such as the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Kennedy and King assassinations, and the Civil Rights Movement, produced a different set of values, attitudes, and beliefs amongst the Baby Boomer generation. Unlike the Silent generation, Boomers don’t trust the government. While members of the Silent generation expressed their discontent with G.I. politics and religion through non-violent methods and maintained respect for their elders (e.g., Martin Luther King’s approach to the Civil

Rights Movement), the coming-of-age Boomers attempted to influence social change through extreme measures in terms of riots and protests without fear of punishment (Strauss & Howe, 1991). “Though not pacifist by nature, Boomers had been raised to question, argue, and ultimately disobey orders not comporting with self-felt standards and ultimate sacrifices” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 310). In addition, Boomers took extreme measures to avoid the draft, including getting married, having children, and even abusing their own bodies so that they failed the physical (Strauss & Howe, 1991). They are less likely than the previous generation to select a political party affiliation, and instead, tend to vote based on individual issues (Dychtwald, 1999).

The introduction and popularity of television during the Boomers’ growing up years also played a role in the shaping of values and attitudes for this generation (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). According to Dychtwald (1999), Baby Boomers had watched approximately 5,000 hours of television by the time they were six years old, exposed to programming and advertisements targeted toward children, such as the *Mickey Mouse Club*, *Little Rascals*, and *Howdy Doody*. Dychtwald credited television with exposing children to other lifestyles and regional accents that weren’t available to previous generations. During their coming of age years, Boomers witnessed controversial world events right from their own living rooms, including Watergate, the Vietnam War, Civil Rights and women’s movements, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., the Kent State University shootings and more (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002).

Having grown up in the midst of a booming post-war economy with general prosperity, Boomers tend to be more liberal in their spending habits than their parents

(Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). As teenagers, Boomers redefined the music and entertainment industry, possessing discretionary income to influence the clothing, music, and movie industries (Dychtwald, 1999). As adults, Boomers continued to adopt and support activities and behaviors that suited their self interests. They adopted fads that focused on the inner self, such as exercise and diet, self-religion, free agency in professional sports, and meaningful careers (Strauss & Howe, 1991). They believe in health and wellness, youth, work, and involvement (Reynolds, 2005; Zemke, 2000). As they approached midlife in the 1980s, Boomers were considered to have gained a new sense of responsibility, paying attention to politically correct behavior, corporal punishment, and health consciousness – behaviors and attitudes that would not have been supported during the Boomers' coming of age years. Boomers now have more power in the political arena and are using governmental institutions to achieve social change and reinforce moral values. This change in attitude from their coming of age years has made other generations consider them hypocritical (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Boomers in the Workplace

In the workplace, Boomers have demonstrated their competitiveness by competing for positions and promotions within the typically accepted corporate structures of the G.I. and Silent generations (Reynolds, 2005). In contrast to this need to compete, Zemke et al. (2000) stated that Boomers value teams and claim to lead with a participative style that is oftentimes preached more than it is practiced. Boomers make up approximately 37% of the U.S. workforce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). They can be found in a variety of industries serving in a variety of roles, including technical,

management, service, and production, and like to be in environments where relationships can be built (Zemke et al., 2000). They value training to continue growing their marketability or expand their options (Reynolds, 2005; Zemke et al., 2000).

Routine-seeking behavior, the first dispositional facet outlined by Oreg (2003), seems to be characteristic of the Baby Boomer generation. Being individualistic, Boomers tend to be judgmental of those who see things differently and often see their way as being the best (Zemke et al., 2000). As a result, Boomers may be resistant to giving up routines and doing things another way at work. In addition, Boomers have a tendency to put process ahead of results (Zemke et al., 2000), suggesting that routines are important to this generation. Furthermore, Boomers associate work with self-identity and worth (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). Requiring Boomers to give up old habits that have worked for them in the past may threaten their individual identity.

Emotional reaction to change, which includes psychological resilience and loss of control, is the second facet outlined by Oreg (2003) that leads to resistance to change. Wanberg and Banas (2000) found that individuals who reported higher self-esteem and optimism were more open to change. The optimistic nature of the Boomer generation may make them more open to change and may also increase their psychological resilience in the workplace (i.e., their ability to achieve stability after a change). At the same time, Boomers are individualistic and may feel a loss of control when change in the workplace is imposed upon them. In these situations, Boomers may resist the change in order to preserve their own interests and goals (Boonstra, 2004). Watson (1971) claimed that resistance to change will be minimized when the change doesn't threaten individuals' autonomy or security and when individuals participate in the change. Because they value

teams and participation, Boomers may respond well to organizational change when they are enabled to participate in the change effort.

Cognitive rigidity is the third facet outlined by Oreg (2003). Boomers have a diverse set of experiences that contribute to their cognitive understanding of change. They grew up learning to compete and share simultaneously as the population of Boomers doubled that of the previous generation and resources were limited to accommodate their numbers. Early practices of aggression and competitiveness used to drive change, as demonstrated by the protest movements, shifted in Boomers' adult years (Zemke et al., 2000). Zemke et al. (2000) believed this may be a result of several factors, one of which is an increased awareness that assertiveness, rather than aggression is the appropriate way to deal with conflict. The result, however, is that Boomers are uncomfortable with conflict and are reluctant to go against their peers (Zemke et al., 2000). On the other hand, Boomers are known to be idealistic (Lancaster, & Stillman, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991), which promotes change toward improving current states. Idealism in conjunction with Boomers' tendency to be self-centered suggests that Boomers may prefer leading or being involved in the change, rather than being on the receiving end of change.

Short-term focus is the fourth dispositional factor for resistance to change outlined by Oreg (2003). As a generation, Boomers are driven, optimistic, and associate themselves with their work. These characteristics suggest that Boomers are willing to devote the time to work through a problem or change, making them more tolerant of the adjustment period associated with change. This tolerance may be influenced by the extent of involvement a Boomer has in the change process.

Generation X

Generational Personality

Generation X is comprised of the 93 million people born between 1961 and 1981 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Members of Generation X grew up in a different environment than that which was afforded to the Baby Boomers before them. For Gen Xers, the environment was without parental authority or family stability (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). During Gen Xer's growing up years, the divorce rate amongst parents tripled, resulting in an increase in single parent households and blended families (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Reynolds, 2005). In addition, parents of Gen Xers often worked outside the home, leaving the children to fend for themselves after school until the parents came home from work. This trend resulted in these children being referred to as "latchkey kids" and instilled values of self-reliance, pragmatism, and independence amongst members of this generation (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). According to Strauss and Howe (1991), parents of Gen Xers tended to focus on their own needs and desires, placing sacrifice after personal fulfillment. As a result, Gen Xers essentially grew up without parental authority, with parents acting more like friends with their children than as authority figures. Gen Xers were expected to be independent and take care of themselves as older generations felt it necessary to expose them to the real world and its problems.

Whereas Baby Boomer children were adored and nurtured, Generation X was the first generation whose parents took pills to avoid having them (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). Increased violence, AIDS, and changing views with regard to

abortion were also part of the social environment in which Generation X children grew up (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991). In their youth, Gen Xers witnessed women's liberation protests, Arab terrorism at the Munich Olympics, energy crises, the Challenger disaster, fall of the Berlin Wall, Operation Desert Storm, and the beating of Rodney King followed by the Los Angeles riots (Zemke et al., 2000). No event, however, served as a rallying point for this generation like World War II did for the Silent Generation or the activist movements did for the Baby Boomers. Likewise, some authors claim that no notable heroes existed for Gen Xers (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). Lancaster and Stillman (2002) asked, "Where is the John Wayne, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, or Walter Cronkite for this generation?" (p. 24). Dychtwald (1999) claimed that Generation X lacks a unifying generational identity; however, Beaudoin (1998) argued that the unifying factor for Generation X is pop culture, rather than a unifying event like previous generations.

Gen Xers are generally skeptical, having been let down in their youth by the institutions that were trusted by previous generations, as well as disappointed by circumstances within their own family structure (Hill, 2004; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). As stated by Zemke et al. (2000), Generation X watched as America seemed to fail militarily, politically, diplomatically, and economically" (p. 96). Likewise, Lancaster and Stillman (2002) stated: "Generation Xers are an extremely resourceful and independent generation who count on their peers and themselves to get things done and don't hold out too many false hopes that any person or institution is going to swoop down and save them from reality" (p. 26). Gen Xers witnessed their parents' stress from working long hours just to be dismissed during the mass wave of layoffs that took place

throughout corporate America in the 1980s (Hill, 2004; Reynolds, 2005; Zemke et al., 2000). They also watched as the Challenger exploded during take off with a teacher on board (Zemke et al., 2000). As the first wave of Gen Xers approached adulthood in the 1980s, their economical vulnerability amongst prosperous elders was recognized and many Gen Xers believed that they would have to work harder and longer than previous generations in order to enjoy the same standard of living (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The economic burden had shifted from the old to the young, and Gen Xers are generally making less money in their careers than older generations did at the same age. These types of experiences are contributors to Gen Xers skepticism toward institutions.

Xers in the Workplace

According to Lancaster and Stillman (2002), Generation X is the most misunderstood generation in the workplace. Making up approximately 44.5% of the U.S. workforce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005), they value informality, fun, and work/life balance, which don't necessarily fit within the corporate structures that were established by the G.I. and Silent generations. As a generation, Gen Xers are more culturally diverse than previous generations, and they value diversity and thinking globally (Dychtwald, 1999; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). They are also considered to be technologically savvy, having grown up with computers.

Members of Generation X value fun and informality, pragmatism, diversity, and creativity. Because of these values, Generation X is less likely to be routine seeking than other generations, and instead may look for new and innovative ways of approaching things. According to Zemke et al. (2000), Boomers may say about Gen Xers: "They're

always doing things their own way, instead of the proscribed way (our way)” (p. 116).

The values associated with Generation X align this group to Kirton’s (1976) description of innovators. Innovators are less likely to conform, prefer new ideas, like radical versus evolutionary change, and challenge existing structures and paradigms. In large scale changes specifically, innovators are especially essential to break patterns of routine seeking behavior (Barczak, Smith, & Wilemon, 1987), which suggests that Gen Xers may be useful in helping drive organizational change.

Oreg’s (2003) second dispositional factor for resistance to change – emotional reaction to imposed change – includes loss of control and psychological resilience. Gen Xers are experienced in both of these areas, having coped with major changes in the environment and family structures during their formative years. With many years of practice at regaining equilibrium after a change, they have developed psychological resilience, and as a result, are described by Zemke et al. (2000) as being adept with change. In addition, Gen Xers have developed a sense of independence, taking control over events they experience, thus minimizing loss of control that can lead to resistance to change. They bring these values to the workplace, flexing and adapting to organizational changes with more resilience than other generations.

Cognitive rigidity is Oreg’s (2003) third dispositional factor for resistance to change. Like other generations, past experiences influenced Gen Xers’ cognitive understanding of change, which drives their resistance or acceptance of change (Lau & Woodman, 1995). Significant changes in the political and sociological environment during the Gen Xers formative years as well as changes to family structure created in this group a sense that change was inevitable and that one must adapt and flex with events

that occur. Unlike the Silent generation where an unstable environment led to a value and preference for stability, Generation X has responded to instability with skepticism and self-reliance (Hill, 2004; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). As a result, Gen Xers are generally adaptable, giving them the capability to flex with changes in the workplace.

Short-term focus is the fourth dispositional factor for resistance to change outlined by Oreg (2003). Generation Xers are known to be impatient (Zemke et al., 2000) which gives them a short-term focus. Gen Xers tend to want change to happen quickly, making them intolerant of the adjustment period necessary for organizational change. In their pursuit of career growth and development, Gen Xers tend to change jobs frequently looking for the short-term benefits (Strauss & Howe, 1991). They are also referred to as a “boomerang” generation in reference to their tendency to move back in with parents after less than successful attempts at making it on their own. Lack of tolerance for the adjustment period involved with change can be a liability with Generation X, suggesting again that getting them involved in leading and driving change is important in retaining this group.

Millennials

Generational Personality

The most recent generation to enter the workforce is the Millennial generation, also referred to as Nexters and Generation Y. Millennials are individuals born between 1981 and 2000 and make up approximately 73 million people (Zemke et al., 2000). Millennials are a protected and wanted generation with parents reassuming the

authoritative role as a parent and instilling a civic virtue in their children (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Zemke et al., 2000). This shift in parenting has been identified as a response to the disappointment with how members of Generation X were raised (Strauss & Howe, 1991). A new focus was placed on restoring society with efforts taken against drugs, abortion, teen pregnancy, alcohol, and others. Child-related policy has been a focus in legislation, such as improving the quality of education, and numerous safety measures have been taken from child car seats to bicycle helmet laws. “The Millennials show every sign of being a generation of trends – toward improved education and health care, strengthening families, more adult affection and protection, and a rising sense that youths need a national mission” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p 341).

Millennials in the Workplace

Millennials make up approximately 15% of the U.S. workforce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). They are optimistic, self-confident, culturally diverse, sociable, and achievement-oriented (Hill, 2004; Reynolds, 2005; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Like Gen Xers, they believe in work/life balance and are considered to be high-maintenance by supervisors (Martin, 2004; Reynolds, 2005). They are anticipated to be the highest producing workforce in history (Martin, 2004). They are technology savvy (Hill, 2004) as well as street smart, while possessing strong moral values (Zemke et al., 2000).

With Millennials just starting to enter the workforce, time will tell how they respond to change in the workplace. On one hand, Millennials experienced their formative years in a fast-paced, changing environment, especially in terms of technological advancements, which suggests they can adapt to changes in their

environment. On the other hand, Millennials lived busy, planned, and structured lives, which suggests that they may demonstrate routine seeking behavior. Routine seeking behavior is one of the four dispositional factors associated with resistance to change (Oreg, 2003). Unlike Generation X, Millennials had parents who served as advocates for their children, creating a dependency on parental involvement and guidance. Similarly, in the workplace, this generation is described as needing supervision and structure (Zemke et al., 2000). This suggests that Millennials may respond better to change when it is planned and executed according to the plan.

The second dispositional factor for resistance to change is emotional reaction to change, which includes psychological resilience and loss of control (Oreg, 2003). Like the Boomers, Millennials are optimistic and confident which may make them more open to change in the workplace (Wanberg & Banas, 2000), and thus increase their psychological resilience. In addition, Millennials believe in collective action (Zemke et al., 2000), which may foster a belief in the workplace that they can control events as a group. They may be surprised and disappointed when going to work for organizations that have a more hierarchical approach to management.

Cognitive rigidity is the third dispositional factor outlined by Oreg (2003) for resistance to change, which describes people's tendency not to change. Having grown up in a fast-paced, changing environment, Millennials expect change and are likely to be comfortable with it. Their trust and respect for authority may also lead them to accept change that is driven by management, as long as they remain informed of the plan.

Short-term focus is the fourth facet of resistance to change outlined by Oreg (2003). Advancements in technology during the years this generation has been alive have

created a general culture of getting what you want “right now.” Although Millennials are not labeled as being impatient like Gen Xers, they have grown up in a world where information and resources are easily accessible. It is expected that Millennials will bring this expectation to the workplace, and therefore, may be intolerant of the adjustment time needed for change. With Millennials being relatively new to the workplace, the extent to which they tolerate the adjustment period of change is still to be seen.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the literature pertaining to the dispositional factors associated with resistance to change using a framework based on Oreg’s (2003) four-facet structure on dispositional resistance to change. In addition, an overview of the literature on the four generations in the workplace – Silent, Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials was presented. In the next chapter, the methodology used in this study is discussed to support the objective of this study, which was to provide empirical evidence to either support or reject the claim that differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine if differences between generations existed in terms of resistance to change in the workplace. To do this, a descriptive approach was used to address the research questions: 1) Do differences exist between the four generations in the workplace in terms of resistance to change and 2) to what extent does each generation differ from the others? Data was collected through an online version of the resistance to change scale developed by Oreg (2003) (used with permission) and was analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Bonferroni procedure.

Description of Methodology Selected

A quantitative, descriptive approach was used in this study in order to provide empirical support for the claim that members of some generations are more adept at change than others (See Zemke et al., 2000). A descriptive approach to research is commonly used when the purpose of the study is “to portray an accurate profile of persons, events, or situations” (Robson, 2002, p. 59). In this case, the purpose was to show, or describe, whether differences existed between the four generations in the workplace in terms of resistance to change.

Quantitative designs are typically adopted to test theory (Creswell, 1994), which, according to Robson (2002), “can range from formal large-scale systems developed in academic disciplines to informal hunches or speculations from laypersons, practitioners or participants in the research” (p. 61). From the literature, perceptions about the different

generations have been based on formal theories, such as Mannheim's generational theory and Lewin's Force Field Theory, as well as what appears to be general beliefs about the extent to which particular events during each generations' formative years have influenced members toward change. To validate these arguments, empirical research was conducted in this study to provide support or refutation for the claim that differences exist. According to Crano (2002), quantitative designs "offer a clearer path to understanding the true strength of the variables that affect (or define) a construct than the less formalized narrative approach" (p. 332). Testing the claim that differences exist between generations in terms of resistance to change was intended to either support the use of a common set of strategies and interventions in addressing change regardless of generational consideration, or suggest that consideration be given to generational differences in identifying different strategies and interventions to minimize resistance to change.

The quantitative method utilizes hypotheses, which are statements of prediction related to observable phenomena that are either supported or disproved through empirical testing (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). The role of hypotheses is to guide the direction of the study, identify relevant facts, suggest an appropriate research design, and provide a framework for organizing conclusions (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). These conclusions either support or refute the theories on which they are based. In line with the quantitative approach of this study and intent to provide empirical support for the claim that difference exist between generations in terms of resistance to change, the following null and alternative hypotheses were tested.

H₀: Average resistance to change in the workplace is the same for members of each of the generations.

H_A: Differences exist between generations in terms of average resistance to change in the workplace.

More specifically, Zemke et al. (2000) described the Silent generation as being inept with change and Generation X as being adept and comfortable with change. In a study on higher order values, Egri & Ralson (2004) found that Baby Boomers and Gen Xers attributed higher importance to openness to change than did the Silent Generation, with Gen Xers showing higher attribution than Baby Boomers. Although Millennials were not included in the aforementioned study and they are still relatively new to the workplace, Zemke et al. (2000) predicted that they will be less independent than Gen Xers. On the other hand, Millennials are used to having a full and active schedule and are adaptable to new technologies. Based on this information, additional and more specific hypotheses were also tested.

H₁: The Silent generation has the highest average resistance to change score on the Resistance to Change scale of all four generations.

H₂: The Baby Boomer generation has a lower average resistance to change score on the Resistance to Change scale than members of the Silent generation, and a higher average score than Generation Xers and Millennials.

H₃: Generation X has the lowest average resistance to change score on the Resistance to Change scale of all four generations.

H₄: The Millennial generation has a lower average resistance to change score than members of the Silent and Baby Boomer generations, and a higher average score than Generation Xers.

Design of the Study

A survey instrument developed by Oreg (2003) was utilized to measure resistance to change amongst members of each generation in the workplace. Surveys are commonly used for research in the social sciences and in descriptive studies in particular (Hackett, 1981; Robson, 2002). The purpose of using surveys is to collect quantifiable data about the variables being studied from a population or sample of individuals (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993). In this study, the survey used was a scale that measured resistance to change. The data collected from the survey was quantifiable and statistical analysis was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between generations in terms of resistance to change.

The resistance to change scale was administered online with a request for participation sent to participants through email or posted on the company Intranet. For this study, generations were categorized based on individuals in the U.S. who were born between the following years:

Silent generation: 1925 – 1942

Baby Boomers: 1943 – 1960

Generation X: 1961 – 1981

Millennials: 1982 – 2000

Sample

The objective of this study was to provide empirical evidence to either support or reject the claim that differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace. Ideally, a simple or stratified random sample would be used in order to make generalizations from the data analysis. For this study, obtaining such a sample would require a random selection from a list of names, or sampling frame, for the entire working U.S. population (Robson, 2002). Due to resource constraints of time, funding, and access, obtaining this information was not feasible. Instead, a non-probability sample was used as the only feasible alternative (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Robson, 2002). While conclusions drawn from a non-probability sample can not be generalized, in this case to the entire U.S. population, the results from this study provided empirical evidence to either support or reject the claim that differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace, which met the objectives of this study.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used to select individuals based on the criteria being examined in the research study (Robson, 2002). In purposive sampling, specific research justification is provided for choosing the sample (Riffe, 2005). The two organizations that participated in this study were identified for the following reasons: 1) they were for-profit organizations to meet the criteria of resistance to change *in the workplace*, 2) they had employees from the various generations, and 3) they were accessible based on the researcher's professional network. In addition, the two organizations came from two different industries in order to increase representativeness of the sample. According to O'Leary, "there is growing recognition that non-random

samples can credibly represent populations, given that selection is done with the goal of representativeness in mind” (p. 109).

The two organizations that participated in the study were from the telecommunications and healthcare industries. To ensure each organization was demographically representative of its industry in terms of gender, age, and race, an assessment of each was conducted, comparing the demographic make-up of each organization with data from the 2005 American Community Survey data. The findings showed that both organizations were in accord with the average organizational demographics from their industry in relation to the employed U.S. population (See Appendix A).

Two different approaches were taken to select the sample from each of the participating organizations based on their existing communication channels. For the first organization, the online survey was distributed to a stratified random sample of employees via an email request for participation that included a link to the survey. Due to the small size of both the Silent and Millennial generation groups as compared to the larger Boomer and Generation X groups, the survey was sent to a disproportionate stratified sample to ensure that enough participants were surveyed in the smaller groups to obtain a 95% confidence with a 5% error level (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). The appropriate weightings were then applied during data analysis to restore the groups’ proportions in relation to the population. The number of returned surveys necessary to achieve 95% confidence with a 5% error level in each subgroup were 199 (Silent), 358 (Boomer), 387 (Gen X), and 225 (Millennial), for a total of 1,169 surveys. Estimating a 35% return rate, the surveys were sent out to 413 (Silent), 1,023 (Boomer), 1,106 (Gen

X), and 542 (Millennial) for a total of 3,084 people. For the other organization, a link to the survey was posted on the company Intranet with a request for participation posted on the weekly online memo, a familiar communication tool within the company. This link was accessible to all employees within the second company.

Instrumentation

A scale developed by Oreg (2003) was used to measure resistance to change amongst the study participants. The instrument focused on four facets of disposition associated with resistance to change – routine seeking, emotional reaction to imposed change, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity. According to Oreg, the resistance to change scale was “designed to tap an individual’s tendency to resist or avoid making changes, to devalue change generally, and to find change aversive across diverse contexts and types of change” (p. 680).

Oreg (2003) conducted seven studies to create and validate the resistance to change scale. The first was an exploratory study to create the instrument and make necessary revisions to the initial set of questions. The second, third and fourth studies were conducted to validate the scale structure and establish convergent and discriminant validity. The remaining three studies were used to establish concurrent and predictive validities. These studies validated the scale and demonstrated satisfactory reliability.

Oreg’s scale was of particular value to this study for several reasons: 1) the focus on disposition aligns with the theoretical assumption that members of a generation develop common attitudes and beliefs based on shared experiences during formative development, 2) the scale measures resistance to change outside any particular context,

and 3) the scale has been thoroughly validated and tested for reliability. Respondents were asked to indicate their birth year so they could be categorized into the appropriate generation for analysis.

Data Collection

Data was collected using an online version of the resistance to change scale developed by Oreg (2003). For one of the organizations participating in the study, an email containing a link to the survey and a request for participation was sent to a stratified random sample of 3,038 employees. For the other participating organization, a link to the survey was posted on the company Intranet with a request for participation. This link was accessible to all 2,648 employees within the second organization.

The online survey tool contained a data recording feature that eliminated the need to record the data manually. The data was exported into Microsoft Excel and then imported into SPSS software for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was the statistical tool used to determine if differences between generations existed in terms of resistance to change in the workplace. The one-way ANOVA tests variability between groups by testing whether the null hypothesis is true (Norusis, 2005; Robson, 2002). The Bonferroni procedure was used to determine which groups were statistically significantly different from one another based on the outcomes of the ANOVA (Norusis, 2005). The data was analyzed using SPSS software, and the results are outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

This study investigated whether statistically significant differences between generations existed in terms of resistance to change in the workplace. Data analysis was performed on the survey data collected using the resistance to change scale developed by Oreg (2003). This chapter outlines the results of that data analysis, including the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed to test variability between the generations (Norusis, 2005; Robson, 2002). Determining the variability between the generational groups showed whether the following null hypothesis was true.

H_0 : Average resistance to change in the workplace is the same for members of each of the generations.

H_A : Differences exist between generations in terms of average resistance to change in the workplace.

The results of the ANOVA showed there was not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis in terms of the overall survey mean and each sub-scale mean. Significant differences were found, however, between the Baby Boomers and other generational groups on 4 of the 17 survey questions.

Response Rate

The two organizations that participated in the study were from the telecommunications and healthcare industries. For the telecommunications company, the online survey was distributed to a disproportionate stratified random sample of

employees via an email request for participation. A disproportionate stratified sample was used to ensure that enough participants in the smaller Silent and Millennial groups were surveyed to obtain a 95% confidence with 5% error level (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). A summary of the response rate data is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Survey Response Rates

Generation	Telecommunications organization		Healthcare organization		% combined response rate
	Sample size (n)	Total responses	Sample size (n)	Total responses	
Silent	378	175	99	8	10.76%
Baby Boomer	1,022	458	1,129	179	37.32%
Generation X	1,100	463	1,271	137	35.00%
Millennial	538	271	149	14	16.92%
Total	3,038	1,367	2,648	338	29.98%

The number of returned surveys necessary to achieve 95% confidence with a 5% error level in each subgroup were 219 (Silent), 363 (Boomer), 364 (Gen X), and 247 (Millennial), for a total of 1,193 responses. Estimating a 35% return rate from the telecommunication company participants, the surveys were sent out to 378 Silents, 1,022 Boomers, 1,100 Gen Xers, and 538 Millennials for a total of 3,038 people. Of the 3,038 surveys that were sent out, 1,374 (or 45.22%) were returned. Seven of the surveys were not included in the data analysis because they were submitted with less than 4 of the 17 questions answered. Two were omitted from the Baby Boomer group, one from the Generation X group, and four from the Silent group. This brought the total number of usable surveys to 1,367, which was a 45% response rate for the telecommunications company. Of those responses, the Silent generation comprised 12.80% (n = 175), Baby

Boomers 33.50% (n = 458), Generation X 33.87% (n = 463), and Millennials 19.82% (n = 271).

For the healthcare organization, a link to the survey was posted on the company Intranet with a request for participation posted on the weekly online memo, a familiar communication tool within the company. This link was accessible to all 2,648 employees. Of the 2,648 employees, 354 responded; however, 11 of those surveys were not included in the data analysis because they were submitted with no questions answered, five from the Baby Boomer group and six from the Generation X group. An additional five surveys were omitted because the respondents didn't indicate a birth year, and therefore, their responses couldn't be added to the correct group. This brought the total number of usable surveys from the healthcare organization to 338, which was a 12.76% response rate. Of those responses, the Silent generation comprised 2.37% (n = 8), Baby Boomers 52.96% (n = 179), Generation X 40.53% (n = 137), and Millennials 4.14% (n = 14).

The combined response rate for both organizations was 29.98% (n = 1705). Of those responses, the Silent generation comprised 10.73% (n = 183), Baby Boomers 37.36% (n = 637), Generation X 35.19% (n = 600), and Millennials 16.72% (n = 285). The minimum number of responses needed to obtain 95% confidence with 5% error level was met for the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations. For the Silent generation, the number of responses received resulted in 95% confidence with 5.8% error.

Determining Weights

Since a disproportionate stratified sample was used, appropriate weightings were applied to restore the groups' proportions in relation to the population so that valid significance tests could be calculated. Proportional weighting with no scale effect was used to correct for proportion while not over inflating the scale, which can lead to an underestimation of standard errors in significance testing (Maletta, 2007). With k representing the sub-group, N representing the size of the population, and n representing the size of the sample, the weights for each group were calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Weight} = (N_k/n_k)/N*n$$

Table 2. Weighting Calculations to Re-establish Population (N) Proportions

Generation (k)	Population (N)	Sample Size (n)	Calculated weighting
Silent	512	183	0.3254
Baby Boomer	6,442	637	1.1763
Generation X	7,014	600	1.3597
Millennial	691	285	0.2820
Total	14,659	1,705	

Using this calculation, the weights for each of the groups were 0.3254 (Silent), 1.1763 (Baby Boomer), 1.3597 (Generation X), and 0.2820 (Millennial), as shown in Table 2. Summing the weights for each case once they were applied equaled the sample size, n , thus validating appropriate calculation of the weightings.

Overall and Sub-Scale Resistance to Change Means

For each respondent, the overall survey mean was calculated using the values of the rating scale (Strongly disagree =1, Disagree =2, Inclined to disagree = 3, Inclined to agree = 4, Agree = 5, and Strongly agree = 6). Questions 4 and 14 were reverse coded. In addition, mean values for each of the sub-scales – Routine Seeking, Emotional Reaction, Short-term Focus, and Cognitive Rigidity – were calculated for each respondent. Questions 1 through 5 measured routine seeking disposition. Questions 6 through 9 measured emotional reaction. Questions 10 through 13 measured short-term focus, and questions 14 through 17 measured cognitive rigidity. The overall and sub-scale survey means for each generation are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Resistance to Change Mean Values by Generation

Generation	Routine seeking Mean (SD)	Emotional Reaction Mean (SD)	Short-term focus Mean (SD)	Cognitive Rigidity Mean (SD)	Overall Mean (SD)
Silent	2.39 (.70)	2.82 (.86)	2.42 (.83)	3.51 (.73)	2.76 (.60)
Baby Boomer	2.51 (.72)	2.98 (.87)	2.42 (.77)	3.54 (.70)	2.84 (.56)
Generation X	2.45 (.70)	2.88 (.90)	2.32 (.80)	3.49 (.75)	2.76 (.58)
Millennial	2.47 (.71)	2.96 (.87)	2.35 (.84)	3.45 (.79)	2.80 (.58)

As shown in Table 3, the overall survey means for all generations were between the “disagree” and “inclined to disagree” ratings. Baby Boomers had the greatest overall resistance to change mean, 2.84 (SD = 0.56) followed by the Millennial generation, 2.80 (SD = 0.58). The Silent generation and Generation X both had a mean of 2.76 (Silent SD = 0.60; Gen X SD = 0.58), which was the lowest overall resistance to change mean amongst the groups. Like the overall survey calculation, means for three of the four sub-scales – routine seeking, emotional reaction, and short-term focus – were also between

the “disagree” and “inclined to disagree” ratings for all generations. Cognitive rigidity, on the other hand, showed means between the “inclined to disagree” and “inclined to agree” ratings.

The average resistance to change for the routine seeking sub-scale was less than the respective overall score for each generation. Comparing the generational groups, Baby Boomers had the greatest resistance to change mean for the routine seeking sub-scale, 2.51 (SD = 0.72) followed by the Millennial generation, 2.47 (SD = 0.71) and Generation X, 2.45 (SD = 0.70). The Silent generation had the lowest resistance to change mean for the routine seeking sub-scale, 2.39 (SD = 0.70).

For the emotional reaction sub-scale, each generation had a greater average resistance to change than the respective overall score. Again, Baby Boomers had the greatest resistance to change mean for the emotional reaction sub-scale, 2.98 (SD = 0.87) followed by the Millennial generation, 2.96 (SD = 0.87). Next was Generation X, 2.88 (SD = 0.90). As with routine seeking, the Silent generation had the lowest resistance to change mean for the emotional reaction, 2.82 (SD = 0.86).

The average resistance to change for the short-term focus sub-scale was less for each generation than the respective overall scores. The Silent generation and Baby Boomers both had a mean of 2.42 (Silent SD = 0.83; Boomer SD = 0.77), the highest for this sub-scale. Millennials had a short-term focus mean of 2.35 (SD = 0.84), and Generation X had the lowest resistance to change mean, 2.32 (SD = 0.80).

Average resistance to change on the cognitive rigidity sub-scale for all generations showed the greatest resistance to change of all sub-scales and was also greater than the respective overall survey scores. Baby Boomers once again had the

greatest resistance to change mean, 3.54 (SD = 0.70). Next was the Silent generation, 3.51 (SD = 0.73), followed by Generation X, 3.49 (SD = 0.75). The Millennial generation had the lowest resistance the change mean for cognitive rigidity, 3.49 (SD = 0.79).

Of each of the four sub-scales, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials individually showed the least resistance to change in short-term focus, while the Silent generation showed the least resistance in routine seeking. All generations individually showed the greatest resistance to change with cognitive rigidity. Comparing the generations to one another, Baby Boomers showed the greatest resistance to change in three of the four sub-scales as well as in the overall mean. Generation X had either the lowest or next to lowest resistance to change mean for all sub-scales and tied with the Silent generation for the lowest overall survey score. Both the Silent and Millennial generation showed varied resistance to change means depending on the sub-scale. For example, the Silent generation was the least resistant to change in routine seeking and emotional reaction and the highest in short-term focus. Similarly, Millennials were the second highest in routine seeking and emotional reaction and the lowest in cognitive rigidity.

One-Way ANOVA

The one-way ANOVA determines the ratio of between-group mean squares to within-group mean squares (Norusis, 2005). When the calculated value of this ratio (i.e., F ratio) is close to or equals 1, there is little to no difference between the groups. An F ratio that is significantly greater than 1 suggests that a greater variation exists between the groups than within the groups. To determine if there were differences between the

generations in terms of resistance to change in the workplace, F ratios were calculated for the overall survey and each sub-scale. The observed significance level was also calculated, using the standard 0.05 level, to determine the probability of obtaining an F ratio at least as large as the calculated value when the null hypothesis is true (Norusis, 2005).

Testing Assumptions

As a first step of conducting analysis of variance, the assumptions of normality and equality of variance were tested to ensure that the parametric ANOVA test was appropriate. Normality was tested by viewing a histogram for each of the groups to determine if a normal curve was evident, and a Q-Q plot was created for each of the groups to see if the data values clustered around a straight line (Norusis, 2005). The output of the histograms and Q-Q plots showed the assumptions for normality were met (see Appendix D).

Next, the Levene test was run to test the assumption of equal variances between the generational groups.

Table 4. Equality of Variances Test for Overall Survey Score and Sub-scale Scores

Survey Sub-scales	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Routine Seeking	.192	3	1670	.902
Emotional Reaction	.566	3	1672	.638
Short-term Focus	.912	3	1682	.434
Cognitive Rigidity	1.099	3	1667	.349
Overall Score	.326	3	1607	.807

As shown in Table 4, the significance levels for each sub-scale and overall score were greater than 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis that the variances of each generational group are equal could not be rejected. This supports the equality of variances assumption necessary to use the ANOVA test.

ANOVA Results

With the assumptions confirmed, the one-way ANOVA was used to test the null hypothesis to determine if the resistance to change mean differences between the generations were statistically significant. The null hypothesis is that the average resistance to change in the workplace is the same for members of each of the generations. Table 5 shows the results of the ANOVA.

Table 5. ANOVA Results for the Overall Survey Score and Each Sub-scale Score

Survey Sub-scales		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Routine Seeking	Between Groups	2.393	3	.798	1.588	.190
	Within Groups	838.663	1670	.502		
	Total	841.056	1673			
Emotional Reaction	Between Groups	4.263	3	1.421	1.809	.144
	Within Groups	1312.788	1671	.786		
	Total	1317.050	1674			
Short-term Focus	Between Groups	4.260	3	1.420	2.284	.077
	Within Groups	1045.056	1681	.622		
	Total	1049.317	1684			
Cognitive Rigidity	Between Groups	1.018	3	.339	.638	.591
	Within Groups	886.861	1667	.532		
	Total	887.879	1670			
Overall Score	Between Groups	2.053	3	.684	2.063	.103
	Within Groups	533.053	1607	.332		
	Total	535.106	1610			

As shown in Table 5, the F ratio for the overall survey was 2.06. Since this value is greater than 1, the hypothesis that differences exist between generations in terms of resistance to change appears to be supported; however, the observed significance level of 0.10 shows that the null hypothesis could not be rejected. That is, the probability of obtaining an F ratio at least as large as 2.06 when the null hypothesis is true is 10 times out of 100. This is too great a probability to reject the null hypothesis that no differences exist between the generations in terms of resistance to change in the workplace.

Similar results were obtained for each of the sub-scales. The F ratio for the routine seeking sub-scale was 1.58 with an observed significance level of 0.19. For the emotional reaction sub-scale, the F ratio was 1.81 with an observed significance level of 0.14. The F ratio for short-term focus was 2.28 with an observed significance level of 0.08. Each of these sub-scales had an observed significance level greater than 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis could not be rejected. For cognitive rigidity, the F ratio was less than 1 (0.64), which indicates that any differences in group means were only random variations (Norusis, 2005). A Bonferroni multiple comparisons test validates these findings. With observed significance levels greater than 0.05 for all comparisons, the null hypothesis that no differences exist between generations in terms of resistance to change in the workplace could not be rejected.

Individual Survey Questions

To explore potential differences between the generational groups on individual data points in the survey, the ANOVA test was conducted on each survey question individually. The results showed that 4 of the 17 questions in the survey had an observed

significance level less than 0.05 suggesting that the null hypothesis for these individual questions could be rejected. Rejecting the null hypothesis indicates the unlikelihood that the generations have the same average resistance to change on these four data points.

Table 6 shows the results of the ANOVA test for these four questions.

Table 6. ANOVA Results for Survey Questions 7, 11, 13 and 14

Survey Questions		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
7. When I am informed of a change of plans, I tense up a bit.	Between Groups	10.298	3	3.433	2.854	.036
	Within Groups	2034.707	1692	1.203		
	Total	2045.005	1695			
11. Often, I feel a bit uncomfortable even about changes that may potentially improve my life.	Between Groups	15.445	3	5.148	4.922	.002
	Within Groups	1772.054	1694	1.046		
	Total	1787.499	1697			
13. I sometimes find myself avoiding changes that I know will be good for me.	Between Groups	9.735	3	3.245	3.418	.017
	Within Groups	1606.222	1692	.949		
	Total	1615.956	1695			
14. I often change my mind.	Between Groups	23.432	3	7.811	6.255	.000
	Within Groups	2110.352	1690	1.249		
	Total	2133.784	1693			

ANOVA Results

Question #7, which states “When I am informed of a change of plans, I tense up a bit,” was part of the emotional reaction sub-scale. The F ratio for question #7 was 2.85 with an observed significance level of 0.04. That is, the probability of obtaining an F ratio at least as large as 2.85 when the null hypothesis is true is 4 times out of 1,000. Similarly, the F ratio for question #11, “Often I feel a bit uncomfortable even about changes that

may potentially improve my life,” was 4.92 with an observed significance level of 0.002. Question #13, “I sometimes find myself avoiding changes that I know will be good for me,” showed an F ratio of 3.42 with an observed significance level of 0.017. Both questions #11 and #13 were part of the short-term focus sub-scale. Lastly, question #14, “I often change my mind,” was part of the cognitive rigidity sub-scale. The F ratio for question #14 was 6.26 with an observed significance level of 0.000. For these questions, the observed significance level showed a low enough probability to reject the null hypothesis, which suggests that differences do exist between generations on these data points.

Bonferroni Multiple Comparisons Procedure

Because differences were found to exist between generations on these four data points, the Bonferroni multiple comparisons procedure was used to determine which generations were significantly different from one another for each question. According to Norusis (2005), “when you use a multiple comparison procedure, you can be more confident that you are finding true differences” (p. 315).

Table 7. Equality of Variances Test for Survey Questions, 7, 11, 13, and 14

Survey Questions	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
7. When I am informed of a change of plans, I tense up a bit.	.341	3	1693	.796
11. Often, I feel a bit uncomfortable even about changes that may potentially improve my life.	.822	3	1695	.481
13. I sometimes find myself avoiding changes that I know will be good for me.	1.264	3	1692	.285
14. I often change my mind.	.946	3	1690	.418

Before using the Bonferroni procedure, the assumption of equality of variances needed to be met. Earlier, the Levene test was used to test the assumption at the sub-scale level. The Levene test was used again to test equality of variances between the generational groups for these four questions. As shown in Table 7, the significance levels for each sub-scale and overall score were greater than 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis that the variances of each generational group are equal could not be rejected. This supports the equality of variances assumption necessary to use the Bonferroni procedure.

The results of conducting the Bonferroni procedure (see Appendix E) showed that the differences found for questions #7, #11, and #13 were between the Baby Boomers and Generation X. The difference found for question #14 was between the Baby Boomers and both Generation X and the Millennials. Baby Boomers disagreed less than Gen Xers that they tense up when informed of a change of plans (question #7), feel uncomfortable even about changes that may potentially improve their lives (question #11), and avoid change that they know will be good for them (question #13). In addition, Baby Boomers disagreed less than Gen Xers and Millennials that to change their minds (question #14). This latter difference was greater between Baby Boomers and Millennials (a difference of 0.414 points) than between Baby Boomers and Gen Xers (a difference of 0.192 points).

Summary

Several functions were performed as part of this study's data analysis. First, the response rate was calculated to determine if the minimum number of responses were obtained to reach a 95% confidence level with 5% error. The minimum number was obtained for the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations. For the Silent

generation, the number of responses received resulted in 95% confidence with 5.8% error. The combined response rate for both organizations was 29.98% (n = 1705).

The next step in the data analysis was to apply the appropriate weighting to each generational group. Because a disproportionate stratified sample was used in the study, the appropriate weightings were applied to restore the groups' proportions in relation to the population so that valid significance tests could be calculated. Proportional weighting with no scale effect was used to correct for proportion while not over inflating the scale, which can lead to an underestimation of standard errors in significance testing (Maletta, 2007).

Once the appropriate weightings were applied, the assumptions of normality and equality of variance were tested to ensure that the parametric ANOVA test was appropriate. Normality was tested by viewing a histogram for each of the groups to determine if a normal curve was evident, and a Q-Q plot was created for each of the groups to see if the data values clustered around a straight line (Norusis, 2005). The Levene test was run to test the assumption of equal variances between the generational groups. Each of these tests showed the assumptions for ANOVA were met.

Next, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test variability between the generations (Norusis, 2005; Robson, 2002). Based on this analysis, the null hypothesis that average resistance to change in the workplace is the same for members of each generation could not be rejected in terms of the overall survey mean and each sub-scale mean. Significant differences were found, however, between the Baby Boomers and other generational groups on 4 of the 17 survey questions.

Because differences were found to exist between generations on these four data points, the Bonferroni multiple comparisons procedure was used to determine which generations were significantly different from one another for each question. As with the ANOVA, the Levene test was run to ensure the assumption of equality of variances between the groups was met on these four points. The results of conducting the Bonferroni procedure showed significant differences between Baby Boomers and two other generations. Specifically, the results showed that Baby Boomers disagreed less than Gen Xers on questions #7, #11, and #13, and less than Gen Xers and Millennials on question #14. The next chapter provides a summary of the study, discussion of the results, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The research question addressed in this study was: Do differences exist between the four generations in the workplace in terms of resistance to change? In the literature on generational differences, several authors provided qualitative support for different responses to change amongst the generations; however, little empirical evidence had been cited. While the explanations for how each generation responds to change appeared reasonable based on the different peer personalities of each generational group, empirical evidence was necessary to validate these claims. Furthermore, empirical evidence was needed to determine if generational differences need to be considered as organizational leaders address change within their organizations. Since successfully managing change is necessary to grow the business, remain competitive, and ultimately increase value for shareholders (Kotter, 1996), the implications of generational differences pertaining to change resistance could impact the success of change initiatives. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide empirical support to show whether or not differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace – Silent, Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial.

The significance of the study was to show whether or not generations differed from one another with regard to resistance to change so that managers and other change agents could take into account the differences between these groups in the change

management process. Testing the claim that differences exist between generations in terms of resistance to change either supported the use of a common set of strategies and interventions in addressing change regardless of generational consideration, or suggested that consideration be given to generational differences in identifying different strategies and interventions to minimize resistance to change.

Summary of the Literature Review

Generations and resistance to change were the two variables explored in the literature review.

Resistance to Change

A dispositional approach to resistance to change was taken because this study looked at differences based on peer personalities of each generation. A dispositional perspective describes the inclination or tendency each generation has to be resistant to change regardless of context, which was the objective of this study. Oreg (2003) identified a four-facet structure to the disposition of resistance to change – routine seeking, emotional reaction to imposed change, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity – which provided a framework in which to review the literature on resistance to change.

Routine seeking was the first factor discussed in the literature review. The two main sources of routine seeking disposition described by Oreg (2003) included reluctance to give up old habits and preference for low levels of stimulation and novelty. The second factor in Oreg's (2003) four-facet structure of resistance to change was people's emotional reaction to imposed change, which included reluctance to lose control and lack of psychological resilience. The third factor was cognitive rigidity. Cognition is separate

but connected to disposition, in that disposition influences cognition and cognitive responses (Lau & Woodman, 1995; Smollan, 2006). Cognitive rigidity refers to “the tendency of an individual *not* to change” (Schultz & Searleman, 2002, p. 166). The fourth factor outlined by Oreg was short-term focus. Short-term focus stems from the notion that resistance to change is known to occur even when individuals know that the change will benefit them.

Generations

According to Strauss and Howe (1991), generations enter each life stage through their own generational personality. The collective behaviors and attitudes that result from major events that occur during each generation’s formative years comprise the generation’s peer personality and exist throughout the lifecycle of that generation. The four generations in the workplace today – Silents, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials – each bring their own unique perspectives, values, and attitudes to the workplace. The literature review described each generation’s personality, including their respective values and attitudes, and how these attributes connected to each of the resistance to change factors outlined by Oreg (2003).

Discussion of Results

A quantitative, descriptive approach was taken in this study in order to empirically support or reject the claim that members of some generations are more adept at change than others (See Zemke et al., 2000). Data was collected from a random sample of participants at two different organizations using an online version of the resistance to change scale developed by Oreg (2003). The instrument focused on the four facets of

disposition associated with resistance to change – routine seeking, emotional reaction to imposed change, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was the statistical tool used to determine if differences between generations existed in terms of resistance to change in the workplace.

Overall survey and sub-scale scores

Based on the results of the ANOVA for the overall survey score and each sub-scale, the null hypothesis that differences do not exist between generations in terms of resistance to change in the workplace could not be rejected. This suggests that generational groups at the two organizations participating in the study did not differ in terms of resistance to change at a dispositional level (i.e., based on generational personalities). This outcome was counter to what was hypothesized since the study attempted to provide empirical evidence to support claims in the literature that some generations are more adept at change than others. Nevertheless, the outcome of the study was no less significant because it suggests that the generations may not be as different in terms of resistance to change as originally perceived, at least not based on disposition alone.

Each generation's peer personality, or disposition, is comprised of collective behaviors and attitudes. A dispositional perspective to this study described the inclination or tendency each generation had to be resistant to change regardless of context. The fact that no significant differences were found supports the argument made by Lawler and Worley (2006), as mentioned in Chapter 1, that the majority of people resist change on a case-by-case basis, and that rather than individuals thriving on change or resisting change, the right environment needs to be established for effective change. If that is the

case, then what about the claim that Gen Xers are adept at change, while the Silent generation is inept with change (Zemke et al., 2000)? Going one step further with Lawler and Worley's argument from the perspective of generations, perhaps the differences between generations reside in what is perceived as the desirable effective environment, rather than differences of disposition toward change. For example, a technology-rich environment may be more desirable for Gen Xers and Millennials than it would be for Silents and Baby Boomers.

This makes sense based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which describes how human development is based on individuals responding and adapting to changes in the environment over time. Ecological theory supported the theoretical framework for this study because it described how individual attitudes, beliefs, and values develop. The interest in proximal processes to the study of generations was the influence they have on developmental outcomes that shape values, attitudes, and beliefs, and the sociological impact that results (Turner, 1996). Essentially, this theory provided a framework to understand how generational peer personalities develop.

The results of the data analysis highlight another aspect of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory that was mentioned in Chapter 1. Since its introduction, ecological theory has evolved with Bronfenbrenner focusing on proximal processes that drive development over a human lifespan. This key aspect of the theory suggests that the environment plays a continuous role in the outward expression of generational personalities. Similarly, Lewin's Force Field theory, also part of the theoretical framework of this study, implies the need for context. Force Field theory explains how change is influenced by two opposing factors – driving and restraining forces – that work

against each other to sustain a state of stability (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996; Perseus Publishing Staff, 2002; Schein, 2002). While the driving and restraining forces can be based on dispositional factors, such as those outlined by Oreg (i.e., routine seeking, emotional reaction, cognitive rigidity, and short-term focus), they do not occur without the catalyst of change in the environment.

Consider that the average means for the overall survey score and all but the cognitive rigidity sub-scale were between “disagree” and “inclined to disagree” on the rating scale. In other words, participants across all generations disagreed to some extent that they were resistant to change from the dispositional aspects being measured. Outside of a context, people generally disagreed on average that they were resistant to change, even though much of the literature suggests that people by nature are resistant to change. Although the cognitive rigidity sub-scale showed higher resistance means for all generations with ratings between “inclined to disagree” and “inclined to agree,” no group on average agreed they were resistant to change.

The average means tending toward the “disagree” side of the rating scale as well as the lack of significant differences found between generations at a dispositional level suggests that each generation has members who vary in their dispositions toward change. That is, each generation possesses people whose disposition is open to change, and each generation possesses people whose disposition is more resistant to change. The variance of disposition toward change, therefore, does not appear to be influenced at the group level. Instead, based on generational theory, generations interpret and respond to events (or contexts) differently based on their respective peer personality, and therefore, may respond to *contexts* of change differently from one another. A suggestion for future

research is to explore the contexts of change that drive resistance amongst the generations.

Individual Survey Questions

Although differences in overall resistance to change were not found at the group level, significant differences were found between Baby Boomers and other generational groups on four of the specific questions in the survey. These differences must be discussed carefully because the intent is not to suggest that Baby Boomers are resistant to change while the other generations are not. The data showed all the generations on average disagreed that they exhibit the tendencies outlined in the questions. Instead, the intent is to explore potentially why Baby Boomers disagreed *less than* Gen Xers on four of the questions and *less than* Millennials in the case of question #14. Specifically, Baby Boomers disagreed less than Gen Xers that they tense up when informed of a change of plans, feel uncomfortable even about changes that may potentially improve their lives, and avoid change that they know will be good for them. In addition, Baby Boomers were more inclined to agree than Gen Xers and Millennials that they often change their minds.

Question #7, which stated “When I am informed of a change of plans, I tense up a bit,” was part of the emotional reaction sub-scale. Emotional reaction to imposed change includes both psychological resilience (i.e., the ability to achieve stability after a change) and loss of control. Although the optimistic nature of the Boomer generation may make them more open to change and thus increase their psychological resilience in the workplace, Boomers are also individualistic and may feel a loss of control when change in the workplace is imposed upon them. Gen Xers, on the other hand, are experienced in dealing with loss of control and psychological resilience, having coped with major

changes in the environment and family structures during their formative years. Gen Xers have many years of practice at regaining equilibrium after a change and have developed a sense of independence by taking control over events they experience. These generational attributes may contribute to Baby Boomers disagreeing less than Gen Xers that they tense up when informed of a change of plans.

In addition, Baby Boomers disagreed less than Gen Xers that they feel uncomfortable even about changes that could potentially improve their lives (question #11) and that they avoid change they know would be good for them (question #13). Knowing that Gen Xers tend to make changes for short-term benefits (Strauss & Howe, 1991), the average responses to these two questions make sense. At the same time, these questions contributed to the short-term focus sub-scale, which was intended to measure people's intolerance for the adjustment period in the short-term that can lead to increased resistance to change. Contrary to what is seen in the results, the generational personality of Generation X suggests that they are intolerant of the adjustment period necessary for organizational change if they don't see short-term benefits. The fact that Gen Xers disagreed more than Baby Boomers about being uncomfortable with making changes that are good for them reflects Gen Xers' general disposition of being open to change, rather than addressing the specific context of tolerating the adjustment period that comes with change in the workplace.

Question #14, which stated "I often change my mind," was part of the cognitive rigidity sub-scale. As discussed in the literature review, people interpret and respond to change through their own change schema which is influenced by past experience with change, dispositional factors, general attitude, and commitment to an organization (Lau &

Woodman, 1995). For question #14, the average rating for all generations was between the inclined to disagree and inclined to agree ratings, which was closer to the agree side of the scale than the other questions discussed. Baby Boomers disagreed less than both Gen Xers and Millennials that they often change their minds. Whereas Gen Xers and Millennials both have past formative experiences that required them to be flexible and adapt to change, Baby Boomers were rewarded for their idealistic views. This, along with their tendency to be self-centered, suggests that Boomers are more likely to believe their decisions and views are the “right ones” making them less likely to change their minds.

Implications

In an effort to understand if generational differences need to be considered as part of the change management process, the objective of the study was to provide empirical evidence to either support or reject the claim that differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace. Although the results of this study cannot be generalized to the U.S. population because a non-probability sample was used, the findings provided insight into the claim that some generations are more adept at change than others. Initially, the thought was that evidence of differences would imply that generational consideration be given in identifying different strategies and interventions to minimize resistance to change, while a lack of differences would support the use of a common set of strategies and interventions. Since the results of the study found no differences between the generations in terms of resistance to change from a dispositional perspective, the implication at first would seem to suggest a common set of change strategies and interventions. Certainly, a common strategy is better than no strategy at all;

however, based on the discussion of the results, business leaders may find that considering the peer personalities of each generation and what they value in the workplace will help them establish an effective environment for change, as described by Lawler and Worley (2006).

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study provided insight into the claim that some generations were more adept at change than others. As with any research, the limitations of the study must be identified so that the findings can be appropriately understood in the context of the research being explored. First, to account for shared historical and cultural contexts that contribute to generational development, the scope of the study was limited to U.S. workers. According to Mannheim (1952), a generation is defined only inasmuch as the members of that generation share common political, economical, and sociological experiences during key life stages. That is why two U.S. organizations were selected to participate in the study.

A second limitation pertained to the use of a non-probability sample. A purposive sample was necessary due to the infeasibility of obtaining a random sampling frame for all workers in the U.S. While a non-probability sample met the objective of this study, which was to provide empirical evidence to either support or reject the claim that differences in resistance to change exist between the four generations in the workplace, such a sample does not allow generalizations to be made for the entire U.S. workforce population.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study present several opportunities for future research. First, although an attempt was made to obtain representativeness by collecting responses from two organizations in two different industries, future research that includes participants from other industries would expand upon the findings of whether or not generations differ from one another at a dispositional level in terms of resistance to change.

The organizations that participated in this study were from the telecommunications and healthcare industries, two industries that experience frequent and fast-paced change. Although the demographic makeup of each organization was representative for its industry, what about organizations in other industries that have different demographic compositions? For example, would the same results be produced if conducted in the retail or fast food industries where larger groups of Millennials can be found? Or in the paper industry that is slower to change than others? Ideally, a repeat of this study using a probability sample is recommended to encompass all industries and allow the results to be generalized to the entire working U.S. population.

Such a large sampling frame would require extensive resources and accessibility however, and may not be realistic. Alternatively, repeating this study with samples from other targeted industries would help validate the results of this study or provide contrasting results to raise additional questions pertaining to the claim that different generations are more adept at change than others. Repeating this study using the alternative method of targeting other industries would also provide insight into the generational differences within those particular industries.

A second recommendation for future study is to explore whether or not generations demonstrate resistance to change differently in different environmental contexts. This study purposefully examined generations' resistance to change from a dispositional perspective. The claim that different generations are more adept at change than others suggested that some generations would be more resistant to change based on generational personalities (i.e., dispositions) alone. The results of the study showed that this was not the case. Instead, when respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements that described dispositional characteristics of resistance to change, the average for all generations was skewed toward disagreement. This suggests that the people in this study's sample are not typically inclined to resist change. That is, it is not part of their collective personality.

A possible reason why people may have responded the way they did is that they are not inherently resistant, but rather resist change on a case-by-case basis (Lawler and Worley, 2006). For instance, people generally like some variety in their lives, such as trying new things, seeing new places, or improving one's own life. When asked to think about the resistance to change tendencies (as expressed in the survey questions) without a specific context of change, the respondents were likely thinking about themselves in general, rather than in relation to a particular context of change.

A recommendation for future study, therefore, would be to explore whether or not generations demonstrate resistance to change differently in different environmental contexts, and if they do, what are those contexts. A qualitative or mixed method approach would be appropriate for this type of future study, as qualitative data collection methods

would allow contextual trends for each generation to emerge. Once specific contexts have been identified, quantitative methods can then be conducted to validate the findings.

Certainly, generational diversity is not the only diversity factor to consider in terms of resistance to change. Other variables dealing with the diversity of individuals (e.g., sex, race, marital status, etc.) may also contribute to the research on resistance to change and provide organizations with valuable information that can be used to more successfully manage change. This includes looking at the topic of resistance to change from a global perspective. Going back to generational diversity, more research needs to be conducted. As attention to generational diversity becomes necessary to employ a satisfied, yet diverse, workforce, understanding how generations respond to change is necessary for successful change initiatives.

Conclusion

This study tested whether differences existed between generations in terms of resistance to change in the workplace. The findings showed that no differences existed solely at a dispositional level. In the discussion, consideration was given to the notion that environmental context may play a bigger role in defining differences between generations in terms of resistance to change, and this recommendation was given for future research. Even so, the results of this study contribute to the growing field of research on generations and generate ideas for future research to help managers better understand how they can more successfully create an environment for effective change as well as for inter-generational collaboration and teamwork.

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APPENDIX A – COMPARISON OF STUDY VERSUS U.S. POPULATIONS

The tables below provide a demographic comparison of the study population with the overall U.S. population.

Table A1. Gender composition

Gender	U.S. Employed Population in the healthcare industry*	Healthcare organization participating in the study
Female	79.00%	81.74%
Male	21.00%	18.26%

Gender	Engineering workforce in the U.S. **	Engineering population in the telecommunications organization participating in the study	U.S. Employed Population*	Telecommunications organization workforce (minus Engineering)
Female	11.1%	14.27%	46.30%	41.88%
Male	88.9%	85.73%	53.63%	58.12%

Table A2. Age composition

Age category	U.S. Employed Population***	Telecommunications organization participating in the study	Healthcare organization participating in the study
16 to 19	4.11%	0.27%	1.13%
20 to 24	9.57%	4.19%	4.49%
25 to 44	46.14%	46.74%	44.79%
45 to 54	23.59%	32.05%	31.00%
55 to 64	13.03%	14.55%	15.94%
65 to 74	2.91%	2.11%	2.53%
75+	0.70%	0.09%	0.11%

Table A3. Minority composition

Race	U.S. Employed Population***	Telecommunications organization participating in the study	Healthcare organization participating in the study
Am. Indian	0.66%	0.41%	0.23%
Asian	4.19%	4.43%	3.31%
Black	9.92%	5.53%	12.19%
Hawaiian	0.13%	0.01%	0.00%
Hispanic	12.39%	4.62%	4.65%
White	72.72%	78.37%	79.62%

*SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau. (2005). *2005 American Community Survey: S2403, Industry by sex and median earnings in the past 12 months (in 2005 inflation-adjusted dollars) for the civilian employed population 16 years and over*. Retrieved January 13, 2007, from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_S2403&-ds_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_&-redoLog=false.

**SOURCE: National Science Foundation. (2006). *Science and Engineering Indicators 2006*. Retrieved January 13, 2007, from <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind06/c3/c3s1111>.

***SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau. (2005). *2005 American Community Survey: S2301. Employment Status*. Retrieved January 13, 2007, from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_S2301&-ds_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_.

APPENDIX B – NORMALITY TEST RESULTS

Histograms and Normal Q-Q Plots by generation to show that the assumption of normality was met for the overall survey score and each sub-scale

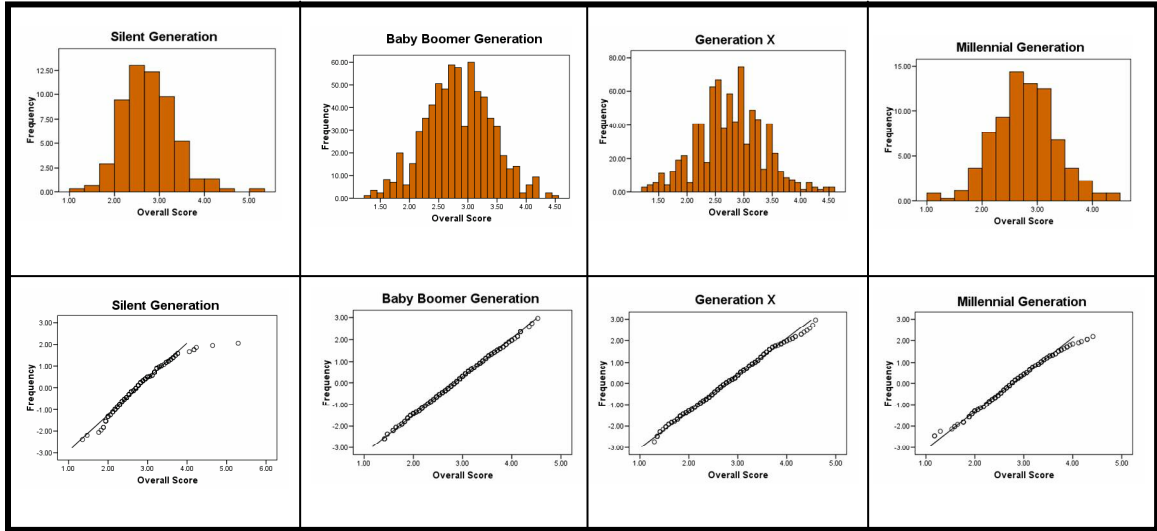


Figure B1. Histogram and Normal Q-Q plots by generation for overall survey score

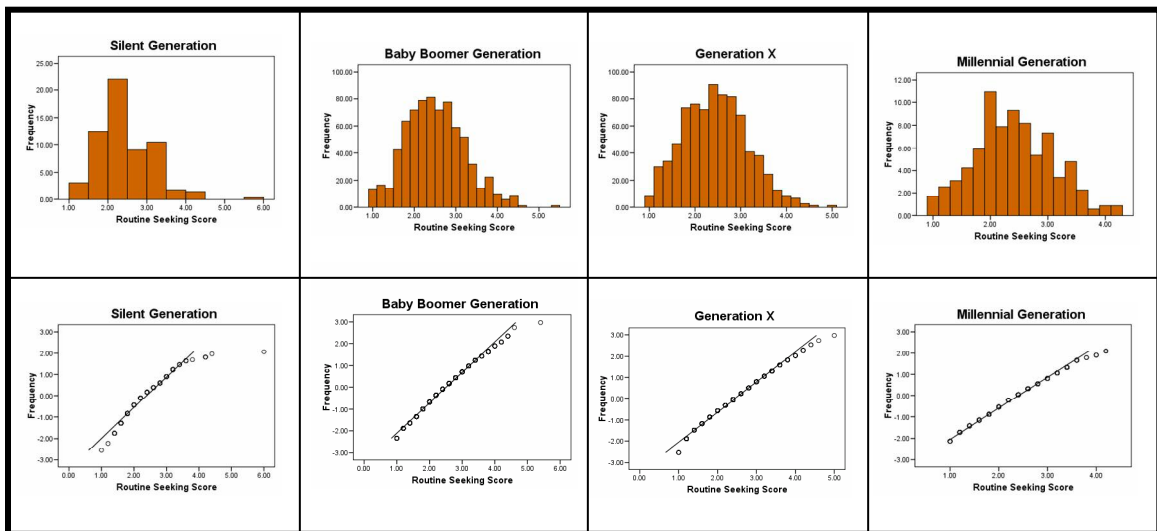


Figure B2. Histogram and Normal Q-Q plots by generation for the routine seeking sub-scale

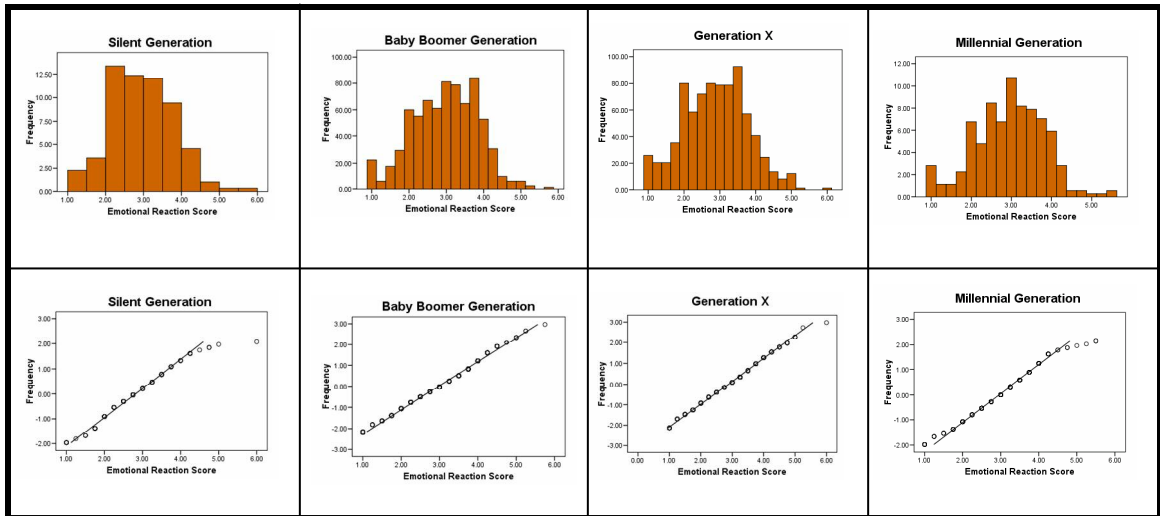


Figure B3. Histogram and Normal Q-Q plots by generation for the emotional reaction sub-scale

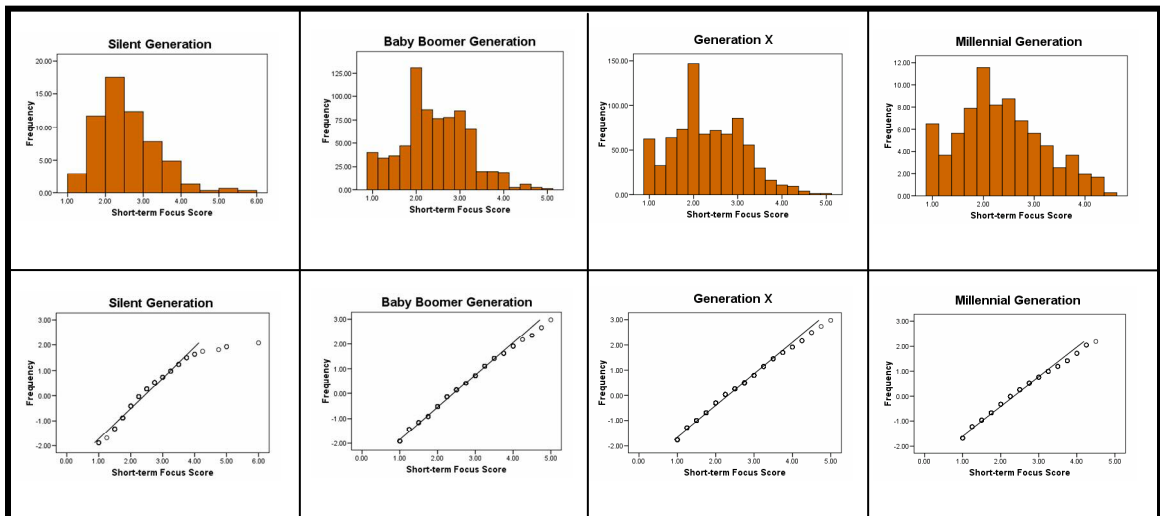


Figure B4. Histogram and Normal Q-Q plots by generation for the short-term focus sub-scale

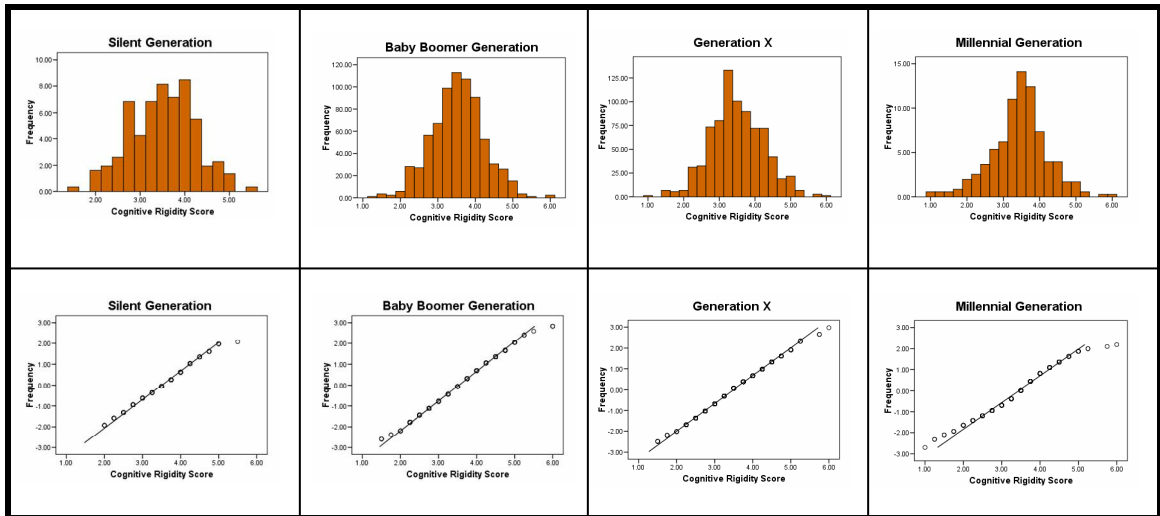


Figure B5. Histogram and Normal Q-Q plots by generation for the cognitive rigidity sub-scale

APPENDIX C – BONFERRONI MULTIPLE COMPARISON RESULTS

Bonferroni multiple comparisons of survey questions 7, 11, 13, and 14

Dependent Variable	(I) Generation	(J) Generation	Mean	Std.	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
			Diff. (I-J)	Error		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
7. When I am informed of a change of plans, I tense up a bit.	Silent	Baby Boomer	-.110	.146	1.000	-.50	.28
		Generation X	.048	.146	1.000	-.34	.43
		Millennial	.058	.187	1.000	-.44	.55
	Baby Boomer	Silent	.110	.146	1.000	-.28	.50
		Generation X	.158(*)	.056	.027	.01	.31
		Millennial	.167	.129	1.000	-.17	.51
	Generation X	Silent	-.048	.146	1.000	-.43	.34
		Baby Boomer	-	.056	.027	-.31	-.01
		Millennial	.009	.129	1.000	-.33	.35
	Millennial	Silent	-.058	.187	1.000	-.55	.44
		Baby Boomer	-.167	.129	1.000	-.51	.17
		Generation X	-.009	.129	1.000	-.35	.33
11. Often, I feel a bit uncomfortable even about changes that may potentially improve my life.	Silent	Baby Boomer	.027	.137	1.000	-.33	.39
		Generation X	.217	.137	.672	-.14	.58
		Millennial	.203	.174	1.000	-.26	.66
	Baby Boomer	Silent	-.027	.137	1.000	-.39	.33
		Generation X	.190(*)	.052	.002	.05	.33
		Millennial	.176	.120	.867	-.14	.49
	Generation X	Silent	-.217	.137	.672	-.58	.14
		Baby Boomer	-	.052	.002	-.33	-.05
		Millennial	-.014	.120	1.000	-.33	.30
	Millennial	Silent	-.203	.174	1.000	-.66	.26
		Baby Boomer	-.176	.120	.867	-.49	.14
		Generation X	.014	.120	1.000	-.30	.33
13. I sometimes find myself avoiding changes that I know will be good for me.	Silent	Baby Boomer	-.020	.130	1.000	-.36	.32
		Generation X	.131	.130	1.000	-.21	.47
		Millennial	.155	.166	1.000	-.28	.59
	Baby Boomer	Silent	.020	.130	1.000	-.32	.36
		Generation X	.151(*)	.049	.014	.02	.28
		Millennial	.174	.115	.773	-.13	.48
	Generation X	Silent	-.131	.130	1.000	-.47	.21
		Baby Boomer	-	.049	.014	-.28	-.02
		Millennial	.024	.114	1.000	-.28	.33
	Millennial	Silent	-.155	.166	1.000	-.59	.28
		Baby Boomer	-.174	.115	.773	-.48	.13
		Generation X	-.024	.114	1.000	-.33	.28

Bonferroni multiple comparisons of survey questions 7, 11, 13, and 14, *continued*

Dependent Variable	(I) Generation	(J) Generation	Mean	Std.	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
			Diff. (I-J)	Error		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
14. I often change my mind.	Silent	Baby Boomer	.051	.149	1.000	-.34	.45
		Generation X	.243	.149	.618	-.15	.64
		Millennial	.465	.190	.088	-.04	.97
	Baby Boomer	Silent	-.051	.149	1.000	-.45	.34
		Generation X	.192(*)	.057	.004	.04	.34
		Millennial	.414(*)	.131	.010	.07	.76
	Generation X	Silent	-.243	.149	.618	-.64	.15
		Baby Boomer	-	.057	.004	-.34	-.04
		Millennial	.222	.131	.543	-.12	.57
	Millennial	Silent	-.465	.190	.088	-.97	.04
		Baby Boomer	-	.131	.010	-.76	-.07
		Generation X	-.222	.131	.543	-.57	.12

Note: An asterisk (*) indicates the mean difference is significant at the .05 level